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**The Upper Minnesota Valley Region  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

**Annual Performance Report**

**December 2017**

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Prepared for Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration

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**Introduction**

This report summarizes the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission’s (UMVRDC) economic development activities within the Economic Development District (EDD) of Region 6W (Counties of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine). This report represents the CEDS Annual Performance Report for the current EDA Planning Grant. The required activities of the District follow the “Scope of Work” that was provided with the EDA Planning Grant. All planning staff is in part responsible for implementing planning activities within the region including economic development programs and projects listed in this report.

**Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (UMVRDC)**  
  
The UMVRDC was created by the RDC Act of 1969 that authorized the establishment of regional development commissions to work with and on behalf of local units of government to develop plans or implement programs to address economic, social, physical, and governmental concerns of each region of the state. The UMVRDC assists with developing and implementing plans and programs for local units of government throughout the five county regional boundaries in western Minnesota. The UMVRDC is one of nine regional development commissions throughout the State of Minnesota.

**UMVRDC Mission Statement**

*“Enable the region to thrive by assisting local units of government.”*

**UMVRDC EDD & CEDS**

The UMVRDC provides leadership for the preparation and maintenance of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), assist in the implementation strategies identified in the CEDS, and provide technical assistance to economic development organizations in the region as required by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as the designated Economic Development District (EDD). The EDD designation and approved CEDS qualify all counties and municipalities within our region for EDA grant assistance programs. In November of 2016, the UMVRDC approved and submitted our CEDS Update to EDA which we are currently implementing.

The UMVRDC CEDS is the result of a continuous regional economic development planning process in our five-county region. The UMVRDC sees the CEDS as a tool to create and retain jobs, promote a more stable and diversified local and regional economy and improve living conditions and the quality of life of the region.

**UMVRDC CEDS Vision**

*The Upper Minnesota Valley region will be recognized for an abundance of place-based amenities, world-class broadband access, collaborative governments, housing opportunities for those moving in and moving over and a highly recognized branded lifestyle that attracts more newcomers each year to communities and jobs in the Upper Minnesota Valley.*

**CEDS Strategy Committee**

The UMVRDC has a board where membership is outlined in state statute. The UMVRDC acts as the governing board for the CEDS. The membership of the UMVRDC is county, city, township, tribal and school board elected officials and a smaller number of public interest representatives. The CEDS Strategy Committee is established through appointment by the UMVRDC. The CEDS Strategy Committee is responsible for developing and updating the goals and strategies in the CEDS and is the principal facilitator of the economic development planning and implementation process.

As outlined in the Federal guidelines, CEDS Strategy Committee members represent all major interests in the community, both public and private to ensure viewpoints of all segments of the community are considered and to take advantage of local skills and resources in program development and implementation. The CEDS Strategy Committee was updated and approved during the full CEDS update in 2016. There are no changes to the membership at this time.

Members of the CEDS Strategy Committee individually participate in many of the projects identified in this plan with their own vested interest in supporting the region. Their individual and collective participation in CEDS work is instrumental in providing local knowledge that allows the UMVRDC to deliver programs and assist with projects that have the greatest impact on the region.

**regional profile**

**POPULATION CHANGE, 2000-2015**

Economic Development Region 6W – Upper Minnesota Valley includes a total of 5 counties, located in the Southwest Minnesota planning area. Region 6W was home to 43,252 people in 2016, comprising 0.8 percent of the state’s total population. The region saw a -13.5 percent population decline since 2000, which was the largest and fastest decline of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 12.2 percent gain from 2000 to 2016 (see Table 1).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1. Population Change 2000-2016** | | | | |
|  | 2000  Population | 2016  Estimates | *2000-2016 Change* | |
| *Number* | *Percent* |
| **Region 6W** | **50,011** | **43,252** | ***-6,759*** | ***-13.5%*** |
| Big Stone Co. | 5,820 | 5,050 | *-770* | *-13.2%* |
| Chippewa Co. | 13,088 | 12,133 | *-955* | *-7.3%* |
| Lac qui Parle Co. | 8,067 | 6,715 | *-1,352* | *-16.8%* |
| Swift Co. | 11,956 | 9,419 | *-2,537* | *-21.2%* |
| Yellow Medicine Co. | 11,080 | 9,935 | *-1,145* | *-10.3%* |
| **Southwest Minnesota** | **394,518** | **391,702** | ***-2,816*** | ***-0.7%*** |
| **State of Minnesota** | **4,919,479** | **5,519,952** | ***+600,473*** | ***+12.2%*** |
| *Source:* [*U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates*](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t) | | | | |

Every county in the region lost population, but Swift County saw the fastest population decline of the 87 counties in the state, followed by Lac qui Parle County with the fourth fastest decline, Big Stone County with the eighth fastest decline, and Yellow Medicine and Chippewa the 13th and 20th fastest declines, respectively.

The recent population declines are part of a longer-term trend in the region, where the population has declined by nearly 30,000 people over the past 66 years. The region suffered the most severe loss during the farm crisis in the 1980s, but has continued losing residents since then, dropping from just over 50,000 people in 2000 to 43,252 people in 2016.

In sum, EDR 6W saw its population shrink by 40.8 percent from 1950 to 2016, by far the largest decline of any economic development region in the state. Likewise, all five counties in the region suffered population declines from 1950 through 2016, including a loss of about 4,600 residents in both Big Stone and Chippewa County, and declines of around 6,400 people in both Swift and Yellow Medicine County. But Lac qui Parle County suffered the fastest and largest decline in the region, losing over 50 percent of its population from 1950 to 2016, a drop of 7,830 residents.

According to 2015 population estimates, the largest cities in the region include Montevideo (5,240 people) and Clara City (1,381 people) in Chippewa County, Benson (3,139 people) and Appleton (1,540) in Swift County, Granite Falls (2,471) and Canby (1,696) in Yellow Medicine County, Ortonville (2,020) in Big Stone County, and Madison (1,558) and Dawson (1,518) in Lac qui Parle County.

**POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2000-2016**

Region 6W has an older population than the rest of the state, with 22.2 percent of residents aged 65 years and over, compared to 15.2 percent statewide. The largest portion of the region’s population was between 45 and 64 years of age. Consequently, Region 6W also had a much lower percentage of people in the 25- to 54-year-old age group, typically considered the “prime working years,” as well as a smaller percentage of school-aged children. With just one postsecondary institution in the region, Region 6W also had a much lower percentage of people aged 15 to 24.

About one-fourth of the region’s population was a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger residents was declining, the number of residents aged 55 to 74 years was rapidly increasing as the Baby Boomers moved into the older age groups. However, the number of people aged 75 years and over was declining, either through out-migration or mortality.

**POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP, 2020-2040**

After several decades of population declines, Region 6W is projected to experience continued declines in the next twenty years. According to population projections from the Minnesota State Demographic Center, Region 6W is expected to lose just over 3,500 residents from 2020 to 2040, an 8.4 percent decrease. In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 10.8 percent.

Most notably, Region 6W is projected to gain nearly 2,100 people aged 75 years and over, a 43 percent increase. The region is also expected to see a small increase in the 25- to 44-year-old age group, as well as a corresponding bump in children under 5 years of age. In contrast, Region 6W is expected to lose school-aged children and young adults from 5 to 24 years of age, as well as people from 45 to 74 years of age.

**LABOR FORCE CHANGE, 2000-2016**

According to data from DEED’s Local Area Unemployment Statistics program, Region 6W has experienced substantial fluctuations in the size of the available labor force over the last 16 years in response to changing economic conditions. During the recessions in both 2001 and 2007, workers flooded into the labor market to earn extra income; then dropped back out when the region’s economy improved. However, the region gained over 730 new workers in the past two years, which was encouraging because it happened in a period of economic strength rather than in response to a recession, and it broke a string of five straight years of labor force declines from 2009 to 2014.

In line with the region’s population decline overall, Region 6W lost about 1,600 workers over the last 16 years, from 25,466 available workers in 2000 to 23,847 workers in 2016. In contrast, the state was steadily gaining workers over the past decade and a half. As the economy has recovered, the labor market in the region has been getting tighter, with less than 1,100 unemployed workers that were actively seeking work in 2016.

**LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS, 2020-2030**

Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group, would lead to a continued drop in workforce numbers in Region 6W.

In addition to the overall decline, the labor force will see a significant shift over time, with small gains in the number of workers aged 65 years and over against huge declines in the number of workers aged 45 to 64 years. However, the region is still expected to see a small gain in the number of workers aged 25 to 44 years, and the 25 to 54 year old age group will still be the largest part of the labor force, still accounting for about 56.3 percent of the total workforce (see Table 2). This will likely lead to a tight labor market in the future as well, with employers needing to respond to the changing labor force availability in the region.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2. Region 6W Labor Force Projections** | | | | |
|  | **2020**  **Labor Force**  **Projection** | **2030**  **Labor Force**  **Projection** | ***2020-2030 Change*** | |
| ***Numeric*** | ***Percent*** |
| 16 to 19 years | 1,200 | 1,056 | *-144* | *-12.0%* |
| 20 to 24 years | 2,410 | 2,345 | *-65* | *-2.7%* |
| 25 to 44 years | 7,271 | 7,435 | *+164* | *+2.3%* |
| 45 to 54 years | 3,859 | 3,490 | *-369* | *-9.6%* |
| 55 to 64 years | 4,929 | 3,086 | *-1,844* | *-37.4%* |
| 65 to 74 years | 1,569 | 1,636 | *+67* | *+4.3%* |
| 75 years & over | 291 | 362 | *+71* | *+24.4%* |
| **Total Labor Force** | **21,529** | **19,409** | ***-2,120*** | ***-9.8%*** |
| *Source: calculated from* [*MN State Demographic Center*](http://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/population-data/our-projections/index.jsp) *projections,*  [*and 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t) | | | | |

**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, 2000-2016**

Up until the past three years, Region 6W had consistently reported unemployment rates that closely matched the state rate. According to Local Area Unemployment Statistics, the region’s unemployment rate hovered right in line with the state rate from 2002 to 2012, even dropping below the state rate during the recession in 2009 and 2010. However, while the state’s economy has recovered and unemployment rates are back to prerecession levels statewide, Region 6W’s rate has stayed higher, and was increasing through 2016.

**HOUSEHOLD INCOMES**

Household incomes were significantly lower in Region 6W than the rest of the state. The median household income in Region 6W was $50,407 in 2015, compared to $61,492 in Minnesota. Almost half (49.5%) of the households in the region had incomes below $50,000 in 2015, compared to 40.6 percent statewide. Another 34.4 percent of households earned between $50,000 and $100,000 in the region. In contrast, only 16.1 percent of households in Region 6W earned over $100,000 per year, compared to 26.3 percent of households statewide.

**PER CAPITA INCOMES**

Not surprisingly, per capita incomes were also lower in the region than the state, ranging from $26,372 in Chippewa and $26,885 in Yellow Medicine to $27,202 in Swift and $27,426 in Big Stone, to a high of $29,541 in Lac qui Parle County, all compared to $32,157 in Minnesota. In sum, Region 6W’s per capita income was $27,294 in 2015.

**COST OF LIVING**

According to DEED’s Cost of Living tool, the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was $55,200 in 2017. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 6W was $42,636 – which was the second lowest of the 13 EDRs in the state. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing; but the region’s housing, child care, taxes, and transportation costs were significantly lower than the rest of the state (see Table 3).

In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario listed above would need to earn $13.67 per hour. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Region 6W would be $24,636, which would require an hourly wage of $11.84 to meet the basic needs standard of living. That was the lowest cost of living for a single person in the state.

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| **Table 3. Family Yearly Cost, Worker Hourly Wage, and Family Monthly Costs, 2017** | | | | | | | | | |
| Region | Family Yearly Cost of Living | Hourly Wage Required | Monthly Costs | | | | | | |
| Child  Care | Food | Health  Care | Housing | Trans-  portation | Other | Taxes |
| Region 6W | $42,636 | $13.67 | $193 | $769 | $396 | $683 | $698 | $425 | $389 |
| Minnesota | $55,200 | $17.69 | $468 | $763 | $472 | $936 | $788 | $496 | $677 |
| *Source:* [*DEED Cost of Living tool*](http://www.mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/col/) | | | | | | | | | |

**WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS**

According to DEED’s Occupational Employment Statistics program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 6W was $15.93 in the first quarter of 2017, which was the second lowest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. Region 6W’s median wage was nearly $4.00 below the state’s median hourly wage, equaling 81 percent of the statewide wage rate, and over $5.50 below the median hourly wage in the 7-County Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to over $11,500 per year for a full-time worker. Region 6W had lower wages than surrounding regions like Region 8 at $16.17, Region 4 at $16.94, and Region 6E at $17.07 (see Table 4).

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| **Table 4. Occupational**  **Employment Statistics by**  **Region, 1st Qtr. 2017** | Median Hourly Wage | Estimated Regional Employment |
| EDR 1 - Northwest | $17.59 | 38,070 |
| EDR 2 - Headwaters | $16.80 | 30,860 |
| EDR 3 - Arrowhead | $17.25 | 141,910 |
| EDR 4 - West Central | $16.94 | 85,410 |
| EDR 5 - North Central | $15.70 | 61,170 |
| EDR 6E - Southwest Central | $17.07 | 47,410 |
| **EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley** | **$15.93** | **16,600** |
| EDR 7E - East Central | $17.78 | 48,990 |
| EDR 7W - Central | $17.48 | 184,510 |
| EDR 8 - Southwest | $16.17 | 50,360 |
| EDR 9 - South Central | $16.99 | 114,470 |
| EDR 10 - Southeast | $18.53 | 259,060 |
| EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities | $21.55 | 1,751,580 |
| **State of Minnesota** | **$19.62** | **2,810,400** |
| *Source:* [*DEED Occupational Employment Statistics*](http://www.mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/oes/) | | |

Over 15 percent of the jobs in Region 6W were education, training, and library occupations, which was more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Region 6W also had a higher share of workers in production, transportation and material moving; installation, maintenance, and repair; construction and extraction; protective services, and farming, fishing and forestry occupations, which had the highest location quotient of any occupation group (see Table 5).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 5. Region 6W Occupational Employment Statistics, 1st Qtr. 2017** | | | |  |  | **State of Minnesota** | |  |
|  | Median  Hourly  Wage | Estimated  Regional  Employment | *Share of*  *Total*  *Employment* | *Location*  *Quotient* | Median  Hourly  Wage | Estimated  Regional  Employment | *Share of*  *Total*  *Employment* | |
| **Total, All Occupations** | **$15.93** | **16,600** | ***100.0%*** | ***1.0*** | **$19.62** | **2,810,400** | ***100.0%*** | |
| Education, Training & Library | $17.88 | 2,520 | *15.2%* | *2.6* | $23.33 | 164,560 |  | *5.9%* |
| Office & Administrative Support | $16.43 | 2,090 | *12.6%* | *0.9* | $18.26 | 404,120 |  | *14.4%* |
| Production | $15.36 | 1,750 | *10.5%* | *1.3* | $17.46 | 220,570 |  | *7.8%* |
| Sales & Related | $11.47 | 1,460 | *8.8%* | *0.9* | $13.48 | 275,740 |  | *9.8%* |
| Transportation & Material Moving | $16.62 | 1,350 | *8.1%* | *1.3* | $17.06 | 178,270 |  | *6.3%* |
| Management | $34.41 | 850 | *5.1%* | *0.9* | $49.20 | 168,370 |  | *6.0%* |
| Personal Care & Service | $11.75 | 840 | *5.1%* | *1.1* | $11.77 | 129,490 |  | *4.6%* |
| Healthcare Practitioners & Technical | $24.27 | 770 | *4.6%* | *0.7* | $32.85 | 174,230 |  | *6.2%* |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair | $21.39 | 740 | *4.5%* | *1.3* | $22.41 | 95,700 |  | *3.4%* |
| Construction & Extraction | $22.66 | 730 | *4.4%* | *1.3* | $26.55 | 98,730 |  | *3.5%* |
| Food Preparation & Serving Related | $9.77 | 530 | *3.2%* | *0.4* | $10.05 | 236,820 |  | *8.4%* |
| Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint. | $12.59 | 510 | *3.1%* | *1.0* | $13.68 | 83,180 |  | *3.0%* |
| Business & Financial Operations | $25.17 | 470 | *2.8%* | *0.5* | $31.83 | 164,180 |  | *5.8%* |
| Healthcare Support | $13.56 | 440 | *2.7%* | *0.9* | $15.11 | 84,730 |  | *3.0%* |
| Protective Service | $19.06 | 380 | *2.3%* | *1.5* | $19.80 | 42,740 |  | *1.5%* |
| Community & Social Service | $20.79 | 360 | *2.2%* | *1.1* | $21.32 | 53,060 |  | *1.9%* |
| Architecture & Engineering | $25.79 | 230 | *1.4%* | *0.7* | $35.96 | 54,400 |  | *1.9%* |
| Life, Physical & Social Science | $28.24 | 160 | *1.0%* | *1.1* | $30.59 | 24,230 |  | *0.9%* |
| Computer & Mathematical | $26.48 | 150 | *0.9%* | *0.3* | $39.75 | 97,680 |  | *3.5%* |
| Farming, Fishing & Forestry | $15.34 | 120 | *0.7%* | *5.5* | $15.31 | 3,680 |  | *0.1%* |
| Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media | $17.61 | 110 | *0.7%* | *0.5* | $22.39 | 37,290 |  | *1.3%* |
| Legal | $30.02 | 50 | *0.3%* | *0.5* | $40.36 | 18,640 |  | *0.7%* |
| *Source:* [*DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2017*](http://www.mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/oes/) | | | | | | | | |

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are in food preparation and serving, personal care and service, sales and related, and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance jobs, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Region 6W and the state is also lower in these jobs. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in management, computer, business and financial operations, healthcare practitioners, and architecture and engineering occupations, which all need higher levels of education and experience, including many that require postsecondary training. The pay gaps between the region and state are much bigger in these occupations.

**Source:** All of the information above, unless otherwise stated is supported by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2017 Regional Profile for the Upper Minnesota Valley region, updated August 1st, 2017.

**2016-2021 UMVRDC CEDS Matrix**

The goals within are big and bold! Success will require collaboration and innovative thinking from the public, private and non-profit organizations in the region. We are all up to the challenge! The CEDS is designed to be a living document and worked on daily over the next five years.

The cornerstone framework divides up our highest priority projects, we’ve organized each project under the cornerstone that was most appropriate for the region. Although each cornerstone contains multiple supporting elements, we have challenged ourselves to sharpen our focus on a specific goal with an action plan. The cornerstones are listed in prioritized order.

The outcomes expected is a substantial impact in each of the cornerstone areas that demonstrates the commitment of our regional network to advancing economic prosperity. That said, the UMVRDC works on a wide-range of community and economic development projects as do our regional partners, that we will continue to work on as needed by the communities we serve and as timely opportunities arise.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cornerstone | UMVRDC  EDD | Baseline  2016 | Goal  2021 | Change | How does it build resilience |
| Community  Resources | Develop a portal for people to connect with regional amenities, jobs and lifestyle info. | No portal  No traffic | Annually increase unique visitor traffic by 20% | 40-60% increase in unique visitor traffic | An online portal will make our region and information about the region more accessible |
| Human  Capital | Raise the labor force participation rate of 25-44 year olds in the region | 87.2% | 89.2% | +2% | Labor force is the life blood of the region with a population aging faster than the state & nation, focusing on this cohort is critical to our future |
| Foundational  Assets | Increase the number of households in the region with broadband access of 100/20 | Current county percentages range between 19% - 99% | Increase all counties by at least 20% | 20% increase or 100% access to 100/20 | Creates new opportunities in jobs, business, education and healthcare and more |
| Economic  Competitiveness | Increase the number of business establishments in the region | 1,528 | 1,600 | +4.7% increase  or 72 businesses | Encourages regional diversification minimizing the impacts of industry challenges |

Annual Update Matrix

**Community Resources Smart Goal**

Develop a regional online portal that provides a helpful connection to the abundance of amenities, jobs available, and lifestyle that can be found in the region using the Get Rural brand.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Action Plan | Tasks | Partners | Resources | Update |
| 1.Create a portal concept and business plan around the “Get Rural” regional brand | * Work with ED Pro’s to develop the concept for the site * Work with a subcommittee on the business plan * Develop a social media marketing plan | EDAs  Chambers  DEED  SWIF  SWMNPIC | Vivid Image (Consultant) | * Website mockup is completed * Business plan development is in process * Funding plan is under development |
| 2. Develop a section of the portal dedicated to entrepreneurs | * Available spaces/resources inventory (vacant buildings) * Collect Testimonials * Promote businesses for sale * Explore a youth section | EDAs  SWIF | SBDC  Gap Lenders | * Working on preliminary business profiles with students * Working on preliminary industrial park profile with Clara City |
| 3. Continue to build a strong Regional Tourism Program | * Blend tourism into the portal - connect with Prairie Waters * Promote and market the growing arts culture and Annual Meander Art Crawl * Promote Visitor for a Day Campaign & Lifestyle Snapshots | Prairie Waters Tourism  Chambers  EDAs | Explore MN Tourism  Southern MN Tourism | * Prairie Waters regional tourism integrated into preliminary website mockup |
| 4. Strengthen the network of organizations that address workforce | * Use the portal as a gateway to regional employment opportunities * Develop a network of people who are willing/able to connect potential newcomers with employers to help make regional connections | EDAs  SWMPIC  DEED | Chambers  Businesses  Schools | * Working with MN DEED and SWMNPIC for employment portal functionality |
| 5. Work with communities to connect them with the regional portal | * Meet with each city and county about the portal * Create a project summary we can share with public, private and non-profit organization * Work with realtors and employers on using the portal * Create measurement tools to share progress with stakeholders in the future | EDAs  Pioneer Public TV  SWMNPIC | EDA (federal)  DEED  Explore MN Tourism  Chambers | * Already have begun Get Rural presentations to existing Prairie Waters partners * Initial presentations to and engagement with regional ED Pros on concept |

**Human Capital Smart Goal**

Increase the labor force participation rate of 25-44 year olds from 87.2%.to 89.2% by 2021.

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| Action Plan | Tasks | Partners | Resources | Update |
| 1. Develop a Regional Recruitment Program  (See Community Resources for details) | * Develop a marketing plan – social media * Create additional online content images, stories, videos, reliable links * Explore regional recruitment best practices – build a welcome network and help our communities be better at welcoming newcomers | EDAs  Chambers | USDA  Bush  Bremer  Blandin  Foundation | * Get Rural portal mockup in place * Developed data warehouse of available marketing content. * Content has been archived and made available for use by regional partners |
| 2. Build childcare capacity in the region | * Support individual community strategies * Collect best practices to share with the region * Explore viable grant/loan options to support child care expansion | Cities  EDAs | First Children’s  Finance  SWIF  UMVRDC  Employers | * Have worked with various communities on projects and funding for childcare initiatives * Working on developing case studies for regional daycare projects |
| 3. Explore career awareness programs / Encourage youth business ownership | * Meet with each of the 10 school districts to discuss the idea and develop strategies to connect students to ownership opportunities in the region | SWIF  School Districts  Higher Education | Junior  Achievement  EDA  Employers | * Early stage conversations with area school districts on careers programs * Plan development ongoing |
| 4. Help employers become mobile friendly to their employees | * Host a workshop on managing remote employees / how to be mobile friendly * Showcase local best practices * Promote job opportunities where employees can be mobile | SWMNPIC  DEED | ED Pro’s  DEED | * Have developed some case studies/success stories linking broadband deployment to local employment changes |
| 5.Expand high speed broadband access in the region.  (See Foundational Assets for details) | * Work with cities and counties who are unserved or underserved with broadband access | Cities  Counties | Broadband  Providers /  EDAs | * Worked with NE YM County, SW LQP County and City of Watson on State broadband deployment grants with Farmers mutual Telephone |

**Foundational Assets Smart Goal**

Increase the percentage of households that have access to 100/20 mbps by at least 20% or until 100% of households are reached whichever occurs first.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Action Plan** | **Tasks** | **Partners** | **Resources** | Update |
| 1. Help communities  better understand  broadband especially  communities  identified unserved  and underserved | * Meet with all cities and counties that are currently underserved with broadband access * Provide education to local elected officials - dig once policies * Promote opportunities to improve and use broadband | Schools  Cities  Counties  EDAs | DEED  EDA  Broadband  Providers | * Worked with NE YM County, SW LQP County and City of Watson on State broadband deployment grants with Farmers Mutual Telephone * Awarded $760K MN DEED broadband deployment grant |
| 2. Connect  communities  to tools kits to  start broadband  conversations | * Facilitate community conversations * Coordinate education panels * Connect communities to Blandin technical assistance | Blandin  DEED Office of  Broadband | Blandin  FTTH Council | * Remained active with local, regional and statewide broadband initiatives * Continued partnerships with Blandin Foundation and local communities |
| 3. Meet with local  providers to discuss  future opportunities | * Determine project/funding possibilities * As requested provide technical assistance to communities with survey work to validate demand/feasibility | Cities  Counties | EDAs  DEED  Schools | * Contracted with Farmers Mutual and Federated Telephone on broadband deployment grants |
| 4. Work with local  EDAs to promote  availability of high  speed broadband | * Determine how broadband can be included in economic development or marketing plans * Work with the private sector to promote the availability of high speed broadband (employers, realtors, chambers) | EDAs  Cities  Counties | Realtors  Employers  Chambers | * Engaged regional EDA’s and ED Pros with broadband initiatives in support of economic development. * Engaged city and county governance in support of broadband deployment |
| 5. Collect stories  about how  broadband has  made a difference  in the region | * Work with cities and counties who are unserved or underserved with broadband access | Broadband  Providers  EDA’s | University of  MN Center for  Small Towns | * Chronicling various regional broadband success stories for Get Rural initiative, web portal and periodic newsletters |

**Economic Competitiveness Smart Goal**

Increase the number of establishments in the region from 1,528 (QCEW, 2014) to 1,600 by 2021.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Action Plan** | **Tasks** | **Partners** | **Resources** | Update |
| 1.Be a connector! | * Assist communities in using the vacant buildings inventory to promote available spaces * Encourage communities to promote the types of businesses needed in the community * Find places to post businesses for sale | EDAs | MNDEED  SWIF  University of MN  Extension | * Building property inventories into Get Rural portal functionality * Utilizing U of M student interns for development of business profiles |
| 2.Work on retention  strategies for existing  businesses | * Encourage communities to go through a BR&E process * Business roundtables – what can economic development staff do to help you be successful? | EDAs | SWIF  Gap Lenders | * Ongoing interactions with EDA’s, ED Pros and RLF borrowers in support of BR & E * Brainstorming with ED Pro’s quarterly on potential trainings in support of BR & E |
| 3. Collaborate with  gap lenders to explore  a “start-up funding  package” | * Research other “start-up packages” * Meet with regional lenders to discuss new ideas * Experiment with the concept of a start-up package * Invite and encourage culturally diverse businesses | Gap Lenders | SBDC  SBA  SWIF  Prairie Land EDC | * Maintained and expanded RLF lending portfolio * Maintained referral relationship for SBDC start-up services * Worked with Milan Micronesian population in support of culturally diverse business development |
| 4. Explore/promote  the development of  jobs that would help  diversify the region | * Look at opportunities to increase jobs in the following industries:   + Arts, Entertainment, Recreation   + Professional and Technical Services   + Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt | EDAs | University  of MN  Extension | * Continued to support Arts development in Milan and Montevideo (Meander, etc.) * Supported the 2017 Frozen Farm Forum Conference on Industrial Hemp and Clean Energy Projects |
| 5. Increase the  amount of resources  that can help improve  main streets –  especially those that  can provide essential  services | * Work with EDAs/local units of government to develop incentives for entrepreneurs willing to invest in a currently vacant building * Help EDAs/HRAs look at models to flip properties * Assist communities in finding funds to demolish properties * Explore an “investor network” | EDAs  SWIF | DEED  HRAs  Local Lenders  USDA RD | * Provided grant writing services for City of Clarkfield abandoned school reformation project * Provided grant writing services for City of Dawson historic building preservation project. |
| 6. Explore cooperative  and/or incubator  ideas for small  business | * Research small business support ideas   + Accounting/Book keeping   + Legal support | SWIF  EDAs  SBDC | EDA (federal)  Regional Workup  Spaces | * Plan and strategy development slated for 2018-2020 |

**Revolving Loan Fund**

A combination of 44 full and part time jobs were created or retained as a result of the four new business loans approved by the UMVRDC during this last year. In total, the RLF lent $245,250 to businesses in the five-county region. Loans for the businesses listed below were approved for equipment, fixed assets, and real estate.

**DoMat’s Family Foods, Benson - $100,000** Equipment – Business Expansion

**Northern Geo, Appleton - $80,000** Business Assets – Business Expansion

**SEWearable Designs, Appleton - $27,250** Equipment – Business Expansion

**Trish’s Catering, Clara City - $38,000** Business Assets/Real Estate – Business Expansion

The RLF’s funds were local banks, Swift County Rural Development Authority; Rural Electric Economic Development; Inc; Southwest Initiative Foundation; United States Department of Agriculture; and The Appleton Project.

FY17 Revolving Loan Fund

*as of 6/30/17*

Total Funds $1,784,574

Loans Current 26

Loans Deferred 1

Loans Default 3

Funds Committed $0

Total Receivables $1,223,486

Total Available for Lending $561,087

**Past Year’s Local Activities & Services**   
Many of the UMVRDC’s programs and projects are large in scope and cross multiple calendar, fiscal and EDA reporting periods. During the past year the UMVRDC has been involved with the following projects, conferences and meetings in support of economic development in our region and throughout the state. The following list provides an overview of our activities and services since July 1, 2016.

* **Yellow Medicine Housing**
  + Yellow Medicine County identified housing as a priority concern when they were determining economic development needs within the county. Both the cities of Granite Falls and Clarkfield worked with staff from the UMVRDC to facilitate a windshield survey of their housing stock.

UMVRDC staff trained volunteers in both cities to establish a baseline of the conditions of the housing throughout the cities. The baseline information gathered consisted of type, condition, status, and occupancy of housing stock. The data collected was entered into the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) which allowed for the cities and county to utilized the information in a variety of ways.

The cities now can use the maps and conclusions for future planning and grant writing

* **Transportation**
  + The UMVRDC is contracted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to administer a transportation planning program. This partnership between MnDOT and the UMVRDC allows for coordinated, long-range, regional transportation planning.

Some of the responsibilities of the UMVRDC Transportation Department include developing regional transportation plans for representation on various boards and committees and acting as a local transportation resource for the region.

* + - **Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan**

The UMVRDC contracted with the Kerkhoven Murdock Sunburg (KMS) School District in 2016 to secure MnDOT funding to develop a Safe Routes to School Plan to improve the safety and health of the students in their communities. In 2017, the UMVRDC worked with KMS School District over an 11-month period to develop plans for both KMS High School and KMS Elementary School. Recommendations were identified for both cities and potential funding sources for the identified improvements were included in the final plan documents. The plan has been utilized by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) and the cities of Kerkhoven and Murdock to establish signed walking and biking paths through each city.

* + - **2017 Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan**

MnDOT contract with the UMVRDC to complete a plan update to the 2011 Local Human Service – Public Transit Coordination Plan as a component of the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan. The UMVRDC engaged a variety of stakeholders throughout the region over a period of six months to provide input and guide the planning process. A steering committee met three times and held a public workshop. On June 27th, 2017 the UMVRDC board adopted the final plan. A Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) will be convened and funded by MnDOT in 2018 and will be tasked with accomplishing goals and projects identified by the plan.

* + - **Transportation Alternatives**

The UMVRDC acted as a voting member of the Transportation Alternatives selection committee for MnDOT District 4 and District 8, who awarded $1.35million transportation funding in 2017.

* + - **Dawson-Boyd SRTS Plan Implementation Assistance**

The UMVRDC contracted with the Dawson-Boyd School District in 2017 to give technical assistance in implementing their Safe Routes to School Plan completed in 2013.

* **Clean Energy Resource Teams**
  + CERTs is a statewide partnership with a shared mission to connect individuals and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community - based clean energy projects.

CERTs utilizes UMVRDC staff to serve as their West Central Region CERTs Coordinator. Kristi Fernholz serves at the coordinator.

Highlights of the West Central Region:

* + - Hutchinson tour showcasing sustainable practices by the city.
    - Outreach for Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program.
    - Educating on solar, LED, wind, and biomass and their implementation, connecting individuals and organizations to clean energy financing tools.
    - Providing limited financial assistance to projects through Seed Grants.
* **Hazard Mitigation**
  + The UMVRDC has been working with the MN Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) to secure funding to complete County All-Hazard Mitigation Plans for Lac qui Parle and Swift Counties in the coming year. RDC staff will work closely with emergency managers and a local taskforce to update their existing Hazard Mitigation Plans. These plans allow local jurisdictions to receive funding from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to implement hazard mitigation strategies that address or mitigate the impact of a variety of natural disasters.
* **Appleton Comprehensive Planning**
  + UMVRDC staff have been working with the City of Appleton on a new comprehensive plan. Appleton saw the need to update their plan so the city could make informed decisions to guide the future of the city. Appleton’s plan will include a community profile, chapters on land use, housing, parks and recreation, economic development, transportation, public infrastructure and more. The working document will also include goals and action plans, and the entire document will go through a public review process during the fall of 2017 and spring of 2018.
* **Danvers Assistance to Firefighters Grant**
  + The UMVRDC assisted the City of Danvers with grant writing for new equipment and personal protective gear through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) administered by FEMA. The primary goal of the AFG is to enhance the safety of the public and firefighters with respect to fire-related hazards.

The grant request was for $156,627 with a total project cost of just under $165,000. Grant awards will be announced in late 2017 and if awarded, the Danvers Fire Department will be able to update their current inventory and best equip the firefighters.

* **Maynard Area History Museum**
  + Maynard continues to work on developing their Historic Maynard State Bank Building into their city museum. This past year, the UMVRDC continued to work with the city to help identify next steps for the museum, and successfully received $6,000 through a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to complete a National Register Nomination for the bank building. Registering the building on the National Register will enable the Maynard History Museum to take advantage of other grants and resources from the Minnesota historical Society.
* **Collaboration with the Center for Small Towns**
  + The UMVRDC utilized two student interns from the Center for Small Towns (CST), a community outreach program that connects students with local units of government, schools, and nonprofit organizations to complete projects, which is connected to the University of Minnesota Morris. The two interns assisted the UMVRDC by collecting photos and videos around the region, writing about communities and events, and creating social media content for the Get Rural campaign.
* **Small Cities Development Program Grant Management**
  + UMVRDC staff continue to author grant applications and provide the general administration of the Minnesota Department of Employment

and Economic Development (DEED) Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) which helps communities with funding for housing,

public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects.

The Clara City SCDP grant was awarded in spring of 2014 and completed December 31, 2016. A total of $533,300 in SCDP grant funds

were provided to refurbish nine owner-occupied homes, 14 multi-family rental units, six single-family rental homes, and five commercial

businesses. UMVRDC staff and Prairie Five Community Action provided the administration of the grant.

The Swift County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Prairie Five Community Action, and the UMVRDC currently administers the

City of Appleton’s SCDP grant. $515,000 of this grant will be utilized to rehabilitate commercial business and owner-occupied housing

by December of 2017.

In the Summer of 2016, the communities of Clinton, Graceville, and Beardsley received notification that their joint SCDP application,

authored by UMVRDC staff, had been awarded. They will have until December of 2018 to utilize the $637,500 in SCDP grant funds

and aim to rehab 26 owner-occupied homes and six commercial businesses. Prairie Five Community Action and UMVRDC staff are busy

working with the communities to reach those goals.

On June 30th, 2017 the UMVRDC was notified that the application our staff authored for the City of Benson was awarded $638,250 in SCDP

grant funds. Between now and September of 2020, an estimated 20 owner-occupied homes and six commercial properties will benefit from

the estimated $854,000 project. The UMVRDC staff will continue to work with the City of Benson and Swift County HRA to administer

the program.

* **Memorial Park Master Plan**
  + Granite Falls asked the UMVRDC to help identify the future use and improvements for Memorial Park. RDC staff helped with grant writing and development of a Master Plan for Memorial Park through the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPT), which recently designated Memorial Park as one of their Regional Parks.

In the summer of 2016, Granite Falls and the UMVRDC worked with Damon Farber, Landscape Architects, who completed a detailed plan that will guide the park in future years. Once the plan was complete in the fall of 2016, the UMVRDC submitted a grant to the GMRPTC to build a new shower house, make improvements on the main park shelter, and rework the entrance to the park to make safety improvements. The request of $595,613 was funded in the spring of 2017 and this project will be implemented in the fall of 2017. A grant for the next phase, which includes a new campground, playground, trail, and ecological restoration, will be submitted in the summer of 2017.

The GMRPTC, created by the Minnesota Legislature in 2013, undertakes system planning and provides recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund, to counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance.

* + **Chippewa & Yellow Medicine Broadband Exploration**
    - Chippewa and Yellow Medicine counties are making a joint effort to ensure fast, reliable broadband internet in their areas. UMVRDC staff worked with the two counties to help determine what their residents and business’ wanted and needed in broadband internet services. Wired Wednesdays took place throughout the winter of 2017 to inform and gather information from six communities across the two counties. Meetings with city officials and a broadband provider panel discussion offered county commissioners a rich dialog to consider when making plans on how to address broadband.
* **Regional Public Sector Feasibility Study**
  + - The UMVRDC finalized a regional public sector broadband feasibility study during the summer of 2017 as the result of a regional brainstorming session with elected officials and staff from around the region. The UMVRDC received funding from the Blandin Foundation and area counties to identify the potential for connecting public institutions throughout the region with a connected fiber network. The study also identified services or other efficiencies that could be developed through the utilization of such a network. A regional taskforce worked with Elert and Associates to complete the study.
* **Lac qui Parle Master Park Plan**
  + - The Lac qui Parle County Park started a master plan in the summer of 2017. With assistance from the UMVRDC, the plan will emphasize public participation to give the park board direction on how the park should be developed and what future projects could look like. The final plan will outline projects, create maps and concept drawings, and provide a list of priority projects for the next several years for the park.

This master plan completes the process to allow the park to be considered for regional designation by the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). If the park is designated, it will be eligible for funds through the GMRPTC.

* **Lac qui Parle EDA USDA Grant Application**
  + - The UMVRDC assisted the Lac qui Parle County Economic Development Authority in writing a United States Department of Agriculture grant. The Rural Business Development grant through USDA is designed to support development or expansion of small, emerging businesses in rural areas. The EDA leveraged $25,000 of their own dollars in the application for the $99,999 grant.

The grant application was due in May and the Lac qui Parle County EDA will receive notification of grant awards later in 2017. The EDA hopes to establish a revolving loan fund for small business’ if they receive the grant.

* **Charting the Future of Local Foods**
  + - The Local Foods Study, led by UMVRDC staff, aimed to answer questions about the potential, availability, and next steps for local foods in the region. “Charting the Future of Local Foods” is the final document of this project completed in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension, the Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (RSDP) and Countryside Public Health - Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP).

The planning process started in the spring of 2016, and worked with stakeholders, growers and places that buy or sell local foods. The RSDP also conducted a local food market analysis to explore the market potential. Currently, local foods account for a very small percentage of food bought in our region. If this percentage were to increase by a small amount, it could result in substantial economic opportunities for local farmers.

The study outlines a list of 58 action steps that address what we can do next to improve the local foods system. From that list, here are a few of the identified priorities:

* + - Find ways that get growers and institutions, restaurants and others together on a recurring basis.
    - Host workshops within communities to figure out how to be more welcoming, supportive, and connected with newcomers, farmers, and others.
    - Explore who is growing food for human consumption in the region. Identify different kinds and scales of growers and identify those who want to scale up and use different marketing mechanisms.
    - Utilize the Buy Fresh Buy Local logo in food campaigns in grocery stores and restaurants.
* **ArtPlace Initiatives in Milan**
  + - Milan is one of three focus communities where the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership (SWMHP) is working to incorporate arts and cultural strategies into their ongoing work of community development such as affordable housing, redevelopment, public safety, and health and wellness. In September 2015, the SWMHP was the recipient of a three-year award from ArtPlace America’s Community Development Investments (CDI) program. The focus of the CDI is to engage arts and cultural strategies in comprehensive community planning and development to help strengthen the social, physical and economic fabric of communities.

The UMVRDC assisted the SWMHP in Milan to complete asset mapping and general technical assistance and acted as a connector between various Milan community members. The aim of this process is to increase collaboration between artists and the community on projects such as housing, healthy home initiatives, and other projects like those typically completed by the SWMHP. The first funded project in Milan will be PlaceBase Productions who will organize a production focused on the process of connecting the community to their shared history and activating the town around its potential future. This production will take place over the summer of 2017.

The second funded project is a team initiative that the UMVRDC is involved in called “The Listening House”. The Listening House is a community-generated art exhibit which will explore the many meanings of home to the people of Milan. The temporary exhibit will be held inside a dilapidated house in which a variety of newcomers have lived. The goal of the Listening House is to identify shared community housing values in Milan through art, play, and conversation. After the exhibit closes, the information gathered will be shared with the city council and used to envision an affordable housing plan that works for Milan’s diverse community.

* **Montevideo Arts Projects**
  + - The UMVRDC has been working with the Montevideo Public Art Project (MAP) to provide grant writing and project implementation for several public art projects in Montevideo.
      * Stained Glass Tractor Sculpture

MAP’s next project will involve Chatfield, MN artist, Karl Unnasch, and a donated antique tractor from the Minnesota Valley Antique Farm Power & Machinery Association. Unnasch, who visited Montevideo to collect stories from residents and history books, will make the tractor into a community sculpture by incorporating these stories into the stained glass, which will be backlit with LED lights and embedded into the tractor. This project was completed in the summer of 2017.

* Painted Railroad Car

A historic railroad car was painted and placed in a permanent location as MAP’s second major public art project. Artist, Liliana Payne, originally from Morris, Minnesota and current resident of Minneapolis, was hired to paint murals on the railroad car. This art not only received a grant from the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council, but also received significant public support. The railroad car is located near the Milwaukee Road Heritage Center.

* **Farmers Mutual Telephone, City of Watson and SW Lac qui Parle County FTTP Broadband Grant**
  + Lt. Governor Tina Smith and the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) announced the 2017 Border-to-Border Broadband Grant recipients. The grants total $26 million for 39 broadband infrastructure projects that will provide 9,973 households, 2,169 businesses, and 60 community institutions across Minnesota access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet. The funding, which comes from a combination of $20 million approved during the 2017 legislative session, plus carryover from previous grant rounds, goes to broadband providers and communities to build out wireline and fixed wireless broadband infrastructure to Greater Minnesota. Below is a description of the project and the amount of funding awarded in the latest round to the UMVRDC region.

Farmers Mutual Telephone, City of Watson and SW Lac qui Parle County FTTP – $760,501. This last mile project will serve 136 unserved households, 15 unserved businesses, and 5 community anchor institutions within the City of Watson and several unserved areas of southwest Lac qui Parle County in western Minnesota. In a funding partnership with the State of Minnesota and the City of Watson, Farmers Mutual Telephone will improve broadband service levels to 1 Gbps down and 1 Gbps up, exceeding the 2026 state speed goal. Broadband infrastructure has been identified as a high priority in the regional strategic plan. The investments will help support job creation and economic prosperity throughout the region, helping numerous businesses create jobs and be more competitive. New jobs related to farming, home-based business start-ups, and commercial expansions are all possible with improved broadband infrastructure. It will also provide improved accessibility for all residents to health care and education opportunities. The total eligible project cost is $1,552,043, with a $791,542 local match.

* **Upper Sioux Community FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation Project Grant**
  + RDC staff contracted with the USC to author and submit a FEMA PDM project grant application for design and construction of a storm safe shelter for the Community’s Wacipi grounds. The grant application submittal deadline was November 14th, 2017.
* **Yellow Medicine 2018 State Bonding Budget Request**
  + UMVRDC staff prepared and submitted a bonding request of $709,000 to the State’s Capital Budget (CBS) system on behalf of Yellow Medicine County for partial demolition and rehabilitation of an abandoned tax-forfeited former school building in the City of Clarkfield for community use.
* **Dawson MN Historical Society Grant**
  + UMVRDC staff completed research and authored a grant to the Minnesota Historical Society for the historic Carnegie Library and Apartment building in Dawson, and have started to process to write a grant for this National Register building so they can get all architectural drawings needed to write a construction grant in the future.

**Past Year’s New or Ongoing Programs & Services**   
Non-infrastructure projects identified in the CEDS as high priority are listed below. Key priority areas should be worked on and completed when an opportunity presents itself or when funding is available to move a key project forward.

* **Minnesota River Valley Scenic Byway**
  + The Mission of the Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance is to cooperatively enhance the Minnesota River Valley as a travel destination and raise awareness of its nationally important stories in order to provide economic benefits and preserve the intrinsic qualities of the byway.

The Minnesota River Valley National Scenic Byway Alliance (MRVSBA) is a partnership of committed individuals from the 287-mile byway corridor representing a variety of interests including chamber of commerce, various attractions and historic sites, state parks, local and state governmental bodies, private businesses, and concerned individuals. The UMVRDC has been providing staffing and fiscal services to the byway since 1996.

The Byway Alliance remains the only organization working to promote the length of the Minnesota River Valley on a regional scale. The byway plays an important role in linking and promoting historical sites and stories to better tell the history of the Minnesota River Valley through a variety of efforts, including its programs, website, calendar, roadside signs, brochures, and other marketing materials.

The Byway received a Heritage Partnership Grant from the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program. The grant enables the byway to coordinate work with cultural experts to include Dakota language and cultural content on our website and in our discovery site descriptions. The project represents and exciting opportunity to include more perspectives in our marketing and interpreting of Minnesota River Valley history. The partnership was extremely successful in building relationships through which multiple future projects were identified. The new content was added to the Byway website over the summer of 2017.

Six Byway videos were also completed in the summer of 2016 that highlight the beauty of the Minnesota River Valley, showcasing Byway partners and recreation opportunities. Advertising campaigns have focused on getting these videos out, and were successful in getting over 123,000 views!

* **Meander Arts Crawl**
  + The 2016 Meander was another success! After tallying reports from Meander artists, the UMVRDC found that Meander attendees purchased more than $114,000 of art over the course of the three days of the art crawl. The estimated 1500 Meander attendees did not just buy art, they also spent $36 on food and gas, $17 on lodging, and $12 on shopping (other than art) per person. If totaled up, this amounts to a total of $98,000 dollars entering the small towns across the five-county region of Big Stone, Swift, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, and Yellow Medicine counties. The Meander Art Crawl highlights the region’s artists and their studios while also introducing people to the region and giving a huge economic boost to the small businesses too.

In addition to the money brought in by the actual event, preparing for the Meander puts money back into the local economy. “Money raised to organize the Meander through both sponsors and artists was spent on products or services (printing, paper, advertising, graphic design, staffing) within the five county area,” said Kristi Fernholz who oversees the Meander for the UMVRDC. The UMVRDC has been a founding organizer of the Meander since it started in 2004 and each year is responsible for organizing the planning, artists selection, fundraising, marketing and financial management of the event.

* **Western Minnesota Prairie Waters**
  + The purpose of Western Minnesota Prairie Waters is to promote the area as a great place to visit, live, and work by highlighting and showcasing our natural, cultural, scenic, and historical assets. Prairie Waters Regional Tourism is supported by the region’s counties, cities, chambers, economic development authorities and the UMVRDC. This year was the first year since 2008 that all five counties have been contributing members, resulting in strong regional presence. 2016-2017 highlights:
    - Wrote a successful grant to Explore Minnesota Tourism procuring $8,000 for advertising the region.
    - Created and placed numerous ads in the region’s newspapers, statewide and out-of-state publications such as Midwest Living, AAA Home & Away, Pioneer Public Television, Western Peach, Pheasants Forever, Explore Southern Minnesota, Outdoor News, Valley Shopper, and Facebook.
    - Partnered with the local county fairs in placing cooperative ads in the Western Peach, Valley Shopper, and Facebook.
    - Convened the Prairie Waters board members and the existing regional recruitment committee on furthering the UMVRDC’s regional recruitment efforts and the developing the Get Rural Brand.
    - Promoted the area and highlighted events on the Facebook fan page. There are currently over 4,546 followers that Prairie Waters markets to with weekly updates, photos and links to stories about the region.
    - Created tourism and lifestyle slideshows for each Prairie Waters member. These slideshows are a great visual way to showcase a community through videos, new photos and creative writing. The slideshows can be shared on any social media platform and embedded directly into any website.
    - Maintained the Prairie Waters website. Added information and photos from new members of Big Stone County and Graceville. Updated new content, photos, videos, and maintained the region’s calendar of events, along with updating the mapping system that includes places to eat, shop, and stay in the region.
    - Created and distributed the NEW 2017-2018 Prairie Waters Visitor’s Guide. These guides are distributed to chambers, cities, and businesses throughout the region; travel information centers across the state and at the Mall of America; and are sent out upon requests through the toll free number and website. The guide is also available as a digital copy and displayed on the Prairie Waters and Explore Minnesota Tourism website. All ads are hyperlinked on the digital copy allowing viewers to have easy access to their interests.
* **Get Rural {Regional Recruitment}**
* Attracting and retaining residents is a key component for the sustainability of the region. Newcomers will fill jobs, start new businesses, populate the schools, become home owners, taxpayers, and new community leaders. Stemming from the “Brain Gain” research and efforts over the past year that convened local chambers, economic development professionals, and local stakeholders, the UMVRDC is preparing an implementation plan to move this effort forward.

Based on a survey to local units of government within the region, the top issue identified was marketing the area to attract new residents, workers, and families. Prairie Waters is a well-developed and supported regional brand and marketing system that is ready to work on this issue. The overall vision is to create a system that makes it easy for someone to get the information they need to make a move to the region, along with helpful tips and tools for locals.

A regional committee of local chambers, economic development professionals, city representatives and others helped identify four buckets to highlight – employment opportunities, housing, family essentials, and things to do. The Prairie Waters website covers ‘things to do’ already; now the goal is to incorporate the other three areas into the Prairie Waters website. The website will be a one stop-shop for anyone looking to visit or potentially move to the region and give them helpful information to guide them through their process. UMVRDC staff have been working closely with web developers on redeveloping the website to include the Get Rural work from the past several years. Over the next year, UMVRDC staff plans to incorporate new content and develop relationships with local entities to feed information into the new web pages.

In addition to the website expansion the UMVRDC has worked with students from the University of Minnesota Morris, Center for Small Towns, to collect new imagery of the region in hopes of changing the negative rural narrative. Students collected an inventory of new imagery by attending community events and sharing their experiences on social media and on the Prairie Waters website. All of this new content is available for governments, organizations and businesses in the region to access and download through an online sharing platform, Dropbox.

Students also collected interviews of newcomers, locals, entrepreneurs, and folks with unique stories that can relate to potential new residents looking to move to the region. Four regional promotional videos were conducted from the collected interviews and are also available.

The students have been running a social media campaign on Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram where they highlight a different city/county each week. The posts vary from job listings, to throw backs of historic photos, quick facts and new photos they’ve collected. This social media campaign has been a huge success thus far engaging with not only potential newcomers but also the locals. The UMVRDC plans to work with students again over the next course of the year to collect more imagery of the region.