



**BUILDING A**  
**Resilient**  
**Region**



# Deeper Dive Assessment

**This publication is an updated report funded by and for the Northwest Area Foundation regarding the work of the Resilient Region Theme Champions.**

[resilientregion.org](http://resilientregion.org)

**Mission:** To create a community-driven, university-assisted partnership around planning sustainable regions that will integrate the disciplines of housing, transportation, natural environment (land use) and economic development (including energy and local foods) that will encompass in-reach strategies through HIGHLY involved civic engagement in efforts to build an inclusive region that will provide opportunities, be free from discrimination and improve the quality of life of ALL residents.



# 1. In Brief

We are a community-driven, public, private, nonprofit, citizen partnership that successfully engaged more than 600 individuals in developing a multi-discipline, region-wide vision for the five county region of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena in central Minnesota. Initially focused on Economic Development, Housing, Land Use, and Transportation, the goal was to think about how these were interdependent – as is the case, especially in rural places.

The 18-month planning process led to the development of a comprehensive regional plan fully integrating 10 themes in the areas of housing/affordable housing, broadband, energy, natural resources & development patterns, education & workforce development, transportation, economic engines, health care, changing populations, government efficiency & effectiveness.

The Resilient Region Champions (implementation structure) is based on a **distributive leadership model**. It is meant to be flexible and organic, able to expand and contract its level of activity as opportunities appear and are addressed.

- 
1. It is organized around the 10 themes
  2. It was started with at least two Champions per theme
  3. It has more than 400 resource organizations
  4. Theme Champions meet once a month within their theme areas and 4-times a year across themes

“Through this unique model – we want to maximize a collaborative cohort to improve the economic and environmental vitality and quality of life for all in this region.” -Tim Houle, Administrator, Crow Wing County, Chair Resilient Region Champions.

The work of the Resilient Region group, through the support of HUD/DOT/EPA Sustainable Communities Project, earned the status of **HIGH ACHIEVING GRANTEE**. This was in part because of our ability to deliver on time and on budget all reports and all proposed activities. It was also because of our uncommon success at community engagement across virtually every measure of diversity. We successfully engaged more than 600 community members, face-to-face, in the planning effort (three times our target). Our past performance demonstrates our ability to engage all. We demonstrated through the Resilient Region planning effort that we can engage all sectors of the community: of the 600, engagement included: business (17%), public sector (12%), nonprofit sector (10%), elected officials (11%), philanthropy (2%), public utilities (2%) and education (7%), with the remainder (39%) comprising of students, laypersons and concerned citizens. We will work, as we did in the past, to engage the often disenfranchised. For the HUD/DOT/EPA project, we exceeded our targets, which were established based on our demographic profile for the region, for youth, low-income, and communities of color.

## HIGH ACHIEVING GRANTEE

### Key

Link to website ..... 

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# Resilient Region Dashboard

## Resilient Region

- > **\$44,725,630.14**  
Raised to Work on Resilient Region Priority Projects



## Broadband – High Speed Access to the World Wide Web

- > \$3.2 Million in High-Skill/High-Wage Jobs Retained for the Region
- > 891 Households able to connect for telework, telehealth, online learning!
- > 122 Low Income Families have improved computer and internet skills as well as access to the WWW



## Choose Health

- > 50 Low Income Families had Access to Healthy Food & 30 Head of Households Improved Health Behaviors
- > Project Replicated in 3 locations and will provide 175 Low Income Families Access to Healthy Foods
- > "It was such a relief to know that we would be getting fresh local produce biweekly."



## Sprucewood

- > 34 Low Income Families (93 people) Obtained Access to Affordable Housing
- > 4 Homeless Families Stabilized their Housing, Remain Safe, and their Children are Stabilized and Attending School
- > Energy Efficiency Results in \$5,808 savings and Lower Rent



## Safe Routes to School

- > 70 Children can now walk or bike safely to school



## RREAL, BHRA, CMHP

- > 102 Low Income Families have stabilized and sustainable



## Sprout

- > 61 Low Income Farmers have Increased Income & Expanded Markets
- > 8000 sq ft Facility has new Life (infill of existing site)



## RREAL/R5DC Solar School

- > 8 Schools, serving 5,500 children, Improved Effectiveness through Solar Energy InstallationExpansion of Renewable Energy Companies
- > Stimulate R&D of Renewable Energy Technologies & delivery of energy STEM education



## 2. Introduction

**We are still here!** Since July 2010, we have gone through a region-wide planning process, developed a plan, and worked on implementing projects consistent with the intent/goals of the plan. We are being asked to speak at conferences and in sessions across the country – answering the questions: “How did you do this? What was your secret? Why is it in this effort you did not create a plan that sits on a shelf gathering dust? How did you engage 600 people?!”

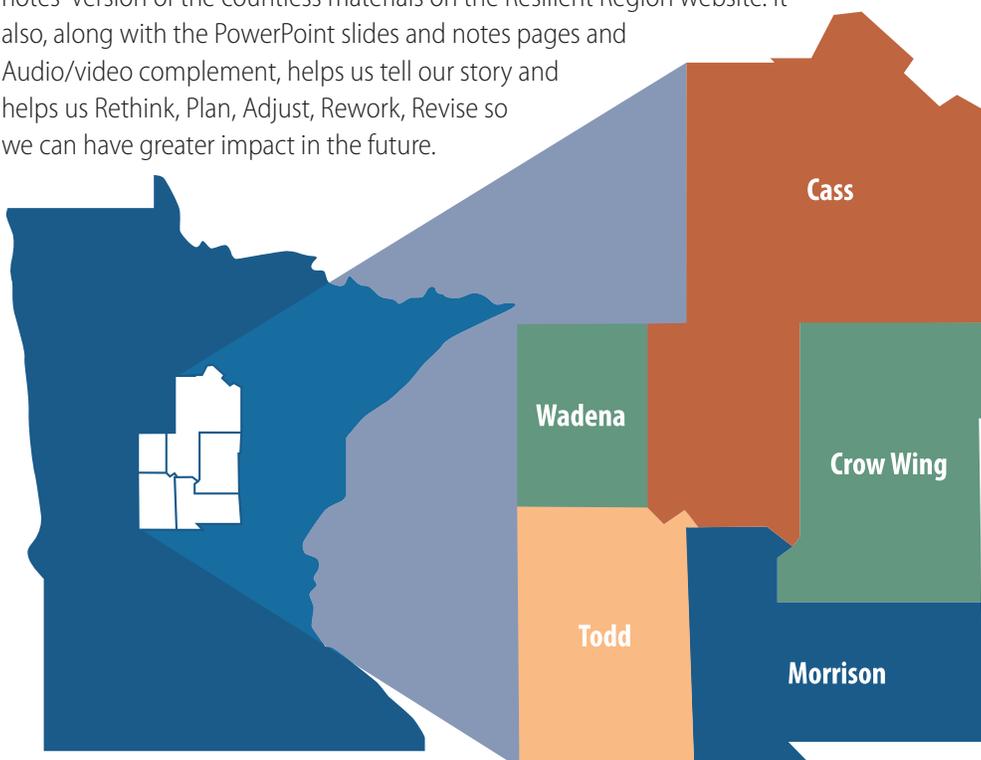
We are being told we are unique. We are being told we have achieved success far beyond what others have been able to accomplish. **Yes indeed, we are proud of \$44.725.630.14 million raised for implementation.**

**However, we keep saying – “we remain a work in progress.”** We self-proclaim that we have not fully recognized the success we all initially envisioned. For example, although we have included all people of our region, we need to improve our efforts to be more “inclusive” with specific communities, such as our art community, in all aspects of our decision making.

This report, funded by the Northwest Area Foundation, is a point-in-time reflection (2016) back upon what we learned to be keys in our success to date and the lessons we have learned that will help inform our work for tomorrow.

**The Audience?** Our core planning team members (10 different agencies, companies, non-profits and foundations) who wanted help tell our story NOT because we are asked to do so, but because we wanted to reflect in ways that can shift and improve our future work. Another audience for this report is those organizations to whom we are asked to present this information. Additional audience for this report is those who want to know more about our impact and how we measure success.

This written document provides hotlinks to key background materials and operates as the “cliff notes” version of the countless materials on the Resilient Region website. It also, along with the PowerPoint slides and notes pages and Audio/video complement, helps us tell our story and helps us Rethink, Plan, Adjust, Rework, Revise so we can have greater impact in the future.



## Acknowledgements

**Anna Gruber**, City/County Manager, National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA), Efficiency and Effectiveness Theme Champion

**Arlene Jones**, Owner/Operator, The Farm on St. Mathias/ Manager, Sprout Food Hub, Economic Engine Theme Champion

**Bob McLean**, COO/GM of Hunt Utilities Group, LLC, Health Care Theme Champion

**Cheryal Lee Hills**, Executive Director, Region Five Development Commission (R5DC), Education and Workforce Development Theme Champion

**Craig Nathan**, Regional Director, Rural MN CEP, Education and Workforce Development Theme Champion

**Dan Frank**, Program Manager for Community Development, Initiative Foundation, Changing Populations Theme Champion

**Dawn Espe**, Regional Development Planner, R5DC, and Natural Resources & Development Patterns Theme Champion

**Deanna Hemmesch**, Executive Director, Central Minnesota Housing Partnership (CMHP), Housing Theme Champion

**Dr. Stacey Stockdill**, CEO, EnSearch, Inc., Connectivity Theme Champion

**Jason Edens**, President, Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL), Energy Theme Champion

**Kristi Westbrock**, Chief Operations Officer, Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC), Connectivity Theme Champion

# 3. Our Past: Where, Why, Who and How?

## Where this work took place?

Crow Wing, Cass, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties, located in central Minnesota, is a rural and small town region with a population of 162,000 in 69,194 households spread over an area of 3,996,051 acres and 9,000 miles of road. Tourism, precision manufacturing and agriculture are the major economic engines of the region and our region is referred to as the Central Lakes Region due to the abundance of lakes.

Our five-county area is blessed with a wealth of business, industry, cultural and natural resources. The Brainerd/Baxter area is one of the top 20 fastest growing micropolitans in the nation. Most of the 65 cities are under 500 residents. We have 151 townships, Minnesota National Guard - Camp Ripley, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe within our five-county area.

## Why did we take on this work?

## Why do we continue to work on this work?

During the time of the HUD/DOT/EPA grant application:

- > All five counties were classified by USDA and EDA as “economically distressed”.
- > The unemployment rate at that time was 9.3% for the five-county area (as compared to 7.8% for the US and 5.8% for MN).
- > The average weekly wage (from the same source) was nearly half of that for the state of Minnesota and many places in the US (2011: US = \$924; MN = \$920; Region Five = \$592).
- > For the 87 counties included in the 2012 Minnesota County Health Outcomes ranking (representing health of a county), the rankings for this region were: Cass 84, Crow Wing, 62, Morrison 78, Todd 67, and Wadena 80.
- > The MN State Demographer has projected that our senior population will increase as much as 39% by 2035.
- > Our region is becoming more diverse with discrimination messages abounding in parts of our region.
- > The pressure on our prairies, lakes and woods means that the land we love so much is disappearing.

**Why are we involved** 🗨️ – we all have many reasons – but at the bottom line – **this is our home.**

this is our home



**Matt Taylor**, Videographer, CFX  
Production and Homeless Youth Case  
Worker, Lutheran Social Services

**Melissa Radermacher**, Economic  
Development Director, City of Staples,  
Efficiency & Effectiveness Theme  
Champion

**Molly Zins**, Executive Director  
University of Minnesota Sustainable  
Development Partnership, Energy  
Theme Champion

**Philip Hunsicker**, AIS Prevention  
Planner, Minnesota Department of  
Natural Resources, former Natural  
Resources & Development Patterns  
Theme Champion

**Sandy Voigt**, Regional Business  
Specialist, R5DC, Economic Engines  
Theme Champion

**Staci Headley**, Regional  
Development Planner, R5DC,  
Transportation Theme Champion

**Tad Erickson**, former Regional  
Development Planner, R5DC, former  
Transportation Theme Champion

## Who are we?

**A Community-Driven, University-Assisted, Partnership.** 🗨️ The core team, advisory board members, and implementation Champions were carefully chosen to bring a cross-section of perspectives and skills from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, as well as expertise in the areas of land use, economic development, transportation and housing.

**The Core Planning Team:** The planning work was supported by a core team from: Region Five Development Commission (R5DC); Central Minnesota Initiative Foundation; Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs); Central Minnesota Housing Partnership (CHMP), Envision Minnesota, EnSearch, Inc., University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, 1000 Friends of MN/EnVision Minnesota, Happy Dancing Turtle/Resilient Living Council.

Our mantra was, “We are a community-driven, university-assisted public/private partnership pursuing economic and environmental vitality and quality of life for all in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties”.

**The Advisory Board:** Established to provide financial oversight and to serve as stewards in order to assure the \$800,000 planning grant from HUD/DOT/EPA was used in a fiscally responsible way that met the grant deliverables.

The primary lesson learned- **use local contractors, as they will engage even after the dollars are gone**- continues to hold true. Many of the core team and advisory board continue to be deeply engaged in the facilitation of the Champions and implementation of projects aligned with the plan.

 use local contractors,  
as they will engage even  
after the dollars are gone

**Community Members: Workgroups and Community-Wide Meetings:** The more than 600 community members engaged in the planning process were also instrumental to the development of the plan. They participated to varying degrees on workgroups, in community-wide meetings, and participated in educational events during the planning process designed to help us better understand “sustainability” and the needs of the region.

We learned and have reaffirmed that: **Communication is key. Being inclusive is tough work. Embrace and honor all voices.** During the planning process, we made sure that everyone had a chance to put their ideas down on paper and share comments/idea if they were comfortable. We had a commitment to honor and include ALL ideas throughout the planning process. Another tool we used was electronic device voting pads for our scenario building and prioritization process.

This commitment meant that they would see their words in draft planning documents that were prepared. We have been told by participants, “This is the first time I have been involved in a planning process where the plan was not a pre-conceived document and my only role was to ‘approve’ it. In the development of the Resilient Region Plan, my voice, my ideas are included,” said Michael Monson, USDA Rural Development.

## Resilient Region Theme Champions

### CHAMPION CHAIR:

**Tim Houle**, Administrator, Crow Wing County

### EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Craig Nathan** (Regional Director)  
Rural MN CEP

**Dr. Chad Coquette** (Executive  
Director) National Joint Powers  
Alliance (NJPA)

**Cheryal Lee Hills** (Executive  
Director) R5DC

**Peggy Kennedy** (President),  
**Jill Abbott** (Assoc. VP of Academic  
Affairs),

**Monty Johnson** (Senior Dean)  
Minnesota State Community &  
Technical College (M-State)

### EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

**Don Hickman** (Vice President)  
Initiative Foundation

**Andrea Lauer** (Mayor) City of  
Royalton

**Melissa Radermacher** (Economic  
Development Director) City of Staples

**Anna Gruber** (City/County Manager)  
NJPA

**Justin Burslie** (Planning and Zoning  
Specialist) NJPA

### TRANSPORTATION

**Tim Houle**, (Engineer) Widseth,  
Smith, Nolting

**Jarrett Leas** (Engineer) Kadmas, Lee  
& Jackson

**Staci Headley** (Regional  
Development Planner) R5DC

### ECONOMIC ENGINES

**Greg Bergman** (Director) Small  
Business Development Center (SBDC)

**Vicki Chepulis** (Grants Coordinator)  
Five Wings Arts Council

**Arlene Jones** (Owner/Operator) The  
Farm on St. Mathias (Manager) Sprout  
Food Hub

**Sandy Voigt** (Regional Business  
Specialist) R5DC

In some ways, this commitment is what made the full plan so long and complicated. Because we honored our intent to “LISTEN TO THE REGION” and not go through a planning process with preconceived notions of what the final plan would entail, we ended up with 10 theme areas. (Originally it was 11 with “Housing” and “Affordable Housing” separate, of which we later combined.)

## Theme areas:

1. **Education and Workforce Development** 🗨️
2. **Efficiency and Effectiveness** 🗨️
3. **Transportation** 🗨️
4. **Economic Engines** 🗨️
5. **Connectivity** 🗨️
6. **Energy** 🗨️
7. **Healthcare** 🗨️
8. **Affordable Housing/Housing** 🗨️
9. **Changing Populations** 🗨️
10. **Natural Resources and Development Patterns.** 🗨️

We could document where the ideas for goals, recommendations and action steps came from and how they aligned with the HUD/DOT/EPA Livability Principles, Region’s Guiding Principles, and the activities included in the original proposal, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies, or workgroups. We heard recently from EDA during a presentation in Colorado that the **TABLE OF THEMES** 🗨️ was the best document we created because it was possible for the funder to identify the source of the idea and how it aligned with the funder’s areas of interest.

We also learned and have reaffirmed that it was important to **GO to where people are already meeting**. One good example is with our work with the Latino Economic Development Center, who helped us hear the voices of our Latino growers.

We also have come to the realization that while we did include and invite everyone, we were not always successful in getting all groups to participate. In working with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO), we discovered that **the region needs to be invited by the LLBO to have conversations that would set the priorities for both the LLBO and the region**. Our perceived idea on how to bring people to the table needed to be altered at times to meet the needs of our community members.

We also received, and continue to receive, considerable pushback from others who do not believe that we should be inclusive. There were many times when the core team was publically and privately attacked because we continued to work to make sure that all voices from the region were heard. More tension arose as a result of little to no appreciation for this effort from our underrepresented communities.

**Enter the Champions.** When the Resilient Region Plan was completed, we knew we had a responsibility to the 600 people who were engaged in developing it to put their plan into action. But the question was – how? The HUD/DOT/EPA no longer had implementation dollars available. We knew we would need to move forward with individual grant writing on projects, but worried that we would lose much of the value of having truly multi-sector, cross-disciplinary visionaries working to help build a resilient region.

So how do you move forward without implementation dollars? Dan Frank of the Initiative Foundation, said it best, “We can either say we can’t implement because we have a lack of

### CONNECTIVITY

**Pam Mahling** (Special Projects and Development Associate) Honor the Earth

**Kevin Larson** (CEO)

**Kristi Westbrock** (COO)

**Joe Buttweiler** (Partnership Dev Mgr) Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC)

**Janelle Riley** (CEO) Syvantis Technologies

**Stacey Stockdill**, (CEO) EnSearch, Inc.

**Sally Fineday** (Wireless Telecommunications Business Manager) Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

**Paul Drange**, (Director of Regional Programs) National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA)

**Janet Johnson**, (Instructor) Minnesota State Community & Technical College (M-State)

**Rick Utech** (Executive Director) Todd County Economic Development Corporation

**Brenda Thomes** (Administrator) City of Long Prairie

### ENERGY

**Keith Olander** (Dean of Agriculture), **Bob Schafer** (Retired) Central Lakes College (CLC)

**Jason Edens** (President) Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL)

**Molly Zins** (Executive Director) University of Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership

**Sarah Hayden** (Coordinator) Central Clean Energy Resource Team (CERTs)

### HEALTH CARE

**Tim Rice** (CEO) Lakewood Health System

**John Solheim** (CEO), Amy Hart (COO), **Peggy Stebbins** (Director of Marketing and PR) Cuyuna Regional Medical Center

**Bob McLean** (COO/GM) Hunt Utilities Group

**Adam Rees** (CEO) & **Mike Larson** (COO) Essentia Health

financial and human resources – or we can say we have hundreds of thousands of dollars and infinite amount of volunteers!” At the end of the planning process, we had 22 individuals who agreed to be Resilient Region Champions and an additional 11 who agree to support that work, who we called “Ex Officios.” The Ex Officio member “*is the one who kept sending out reminders and prompts to keep everybody focused and to keep us in line with deadlines for getting reports in and to help protect the day of the Champion meetings. So in addition to their experience and their input, that person kept us focused on the right time and place to get all the people together and the ideas shared*,” stated Todd Holman, Natural Resource & Land Use Champion. “They provided critical back-office support.”

The Champions were self-identified and initially consisted of leaders and organizations who were working within the theme areas and who represented emerging populations. Champions emerged who had resources to address strategies within the plan set forth by the region and who were committed to reaching out to regional resident to ascertain if we were still on the right track.

The first year of implementation with the Champions (beginning October 23, 2012) may be found in *Building a Resilient Region: Enter the Resilient Region Champions – Lessons Learned in Distributed Leadership* 🗨️ (Fall 2013) and the *Champion Interview Videos*. 🗨️

At the time of this report, (January 2016) we had 44 Champions. They have leveraged nearly \$45 million (*Investment Calculation* 🗨️ -retrieved January 2016) for special projects.

However, we have learned that we are at a stage when the degree to which Champions are engaged varies greatly and used our January 2016 meeting to determine: **What is working? What isn't working? How should we continue to move this work forward?**

We also learned that using the dollars raised as an indicator of success is not the only form of wealth we want to measure. We sought a better measure of successes going forward and discovered that the WealthWorks framework is a tool we can use to be intentional about how we define success.

## How was the work done?

Much of the detail about who was engaged in developing the plan, and how, has been fully documented in the final written plan *Building a Resilient Region* 🗨️ (pages 18 to 24) and the materials included as part of the *Annotated Bibliography*. 🗨️ Step-by-step guides, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts regarding what was done and how it can be found here.

In summary, the planning process included:

**Core Team Planning/Organizing Meetings.** Although members of the core team and advisory team were engaged in developing the “planning framework” for the HUD/DOT/EPA proposal, we realized that we needed to **Plan, Do, Learn, Adjust** on an ongoing basis. There were many, many meetings to plan for each planning meeting. “We had a joke at the office. Were we going to the meeting, pre-meeting, post meeting, or post-post meeting?” said Deanna Hemmesch, Housing Theme Champion.

**Community-Wide Meetings.** There were 10 formal meetings, a kick-off meeting, 5 workgroup meetings, and 4 community-wide meetings to develop the plan (See pages 21 to 22 of the plan).

**Education Period.** During this time we used other events to reflect and learn more about becoming a resilient region. We used specialty studies (such as the regional profile) to learn about the region.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING/HOUSING

**Jennifer Bergman** (Executive Director) Brainerd HRA  
**Colleen Faacks** (Executive Director) Mid-MN Builders Association  
**Janie Weston** (Executive Director) Greater Lakes Association of Realtors  
**Deanna Hemmesch** (Executive Director) Central Minnesota Housing Partnership

### CHANGING POPULATIONS

**Mary Sam** (Director of Intercultural Services/Diversity/Tribal Relations) Central Lakes College (CLC)  
**DeAnn Barry** (Executive Director) The Center  
**Dean Loidolt** (Community Service Developer) Central Minnesota Council on Aging (CMCOA)  
**Dan Frank** (Community Specialist) Initiative Foundation

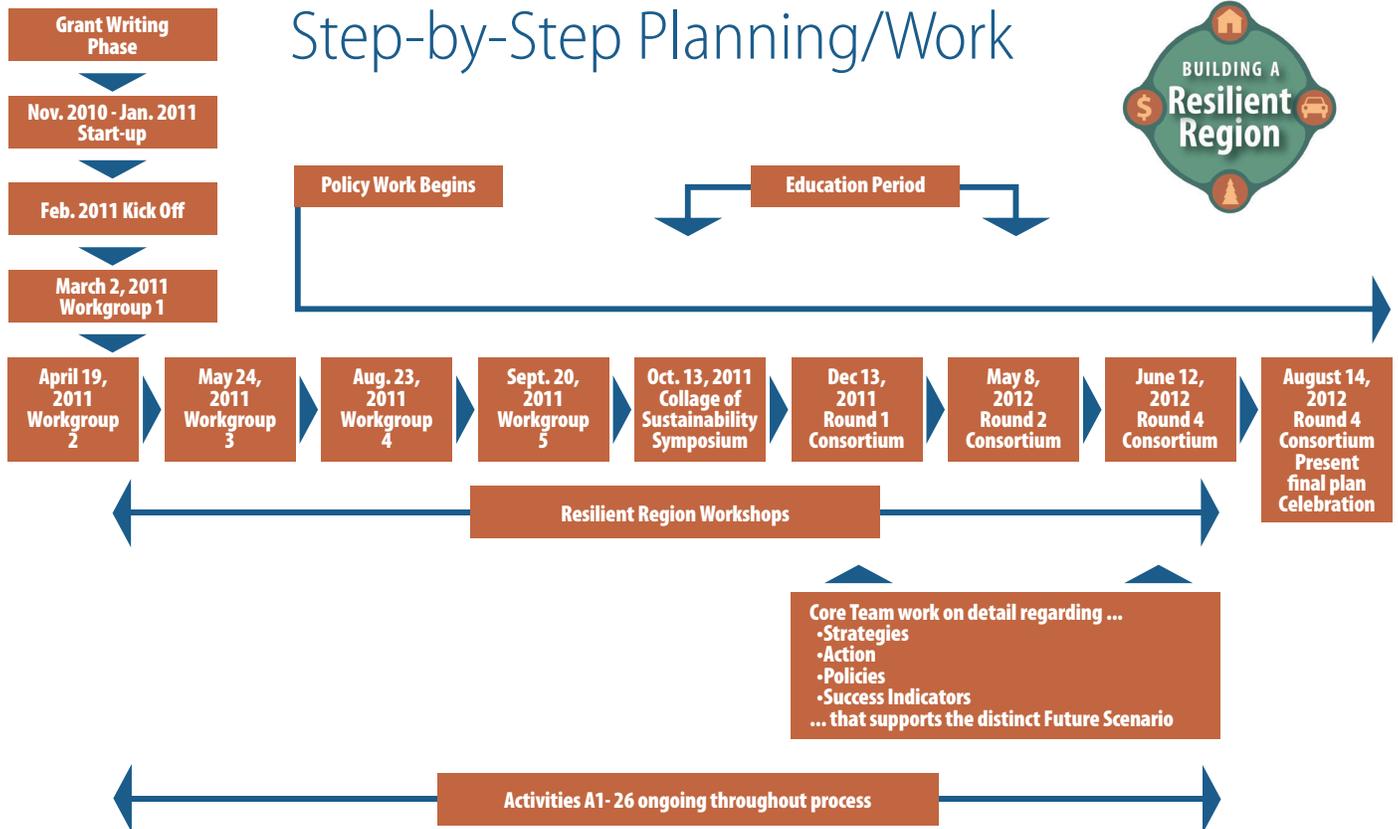
### NATURAL RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

**Todd Holman** (Program Director) The Nature Conservancy  
**Dawn Espe** (Regional Development Planner) R5DC



Early season CSA shares from Sprout.

# Step-by-Step Planning/Work



**Celebration of early successes.** We had 26 concurrent activities that continued to feed additional ideas into the process. This was important for our 600 members to see success as we proceeded through the plan. For example, even before the plan was complete, if we had a partner who was engaged in a project or program that might be seen as “resilient”, such as a renewable energy project at our regional municipal airport, we would lift that up and celebrate the heck out of it to showcase small steps of ongoing success. (Building a Resilient Region 🗨 pages 22 – 23).

**Implementation: The Champions.** Champions began their work with an *orientation* 🗨 of position descriptions and expectations. Since October 2013, we have had quarterly Champion meetings. The agenda tends to be: a) 2-minute timed update from each theme area with quick responses from others at the table regarding resources, information and/or opportunities for collaboration; b) deeper dive into two theme areas to better understand the work and impact to date; c) time at the end, for those who want to stay and network. We believe that food at our meetings is important. In the first year, this was supported through the Bush Foundation grant. In the last year, Champion organizations have stepped up to sponsor the meeting meal.

In the past, the “core team/ex-officio/lead Champions” met and resources were available for Dan Frank to facilitate, as was his role in the past, and for Stacey Stockdill to act as evaluator, documenting both process and impact. Over the past year, resources were not available for these roles, thus we have altered facilitation responsibilities and R5DC has gathered evaluations and reports and posted those to the Resilient Region website.

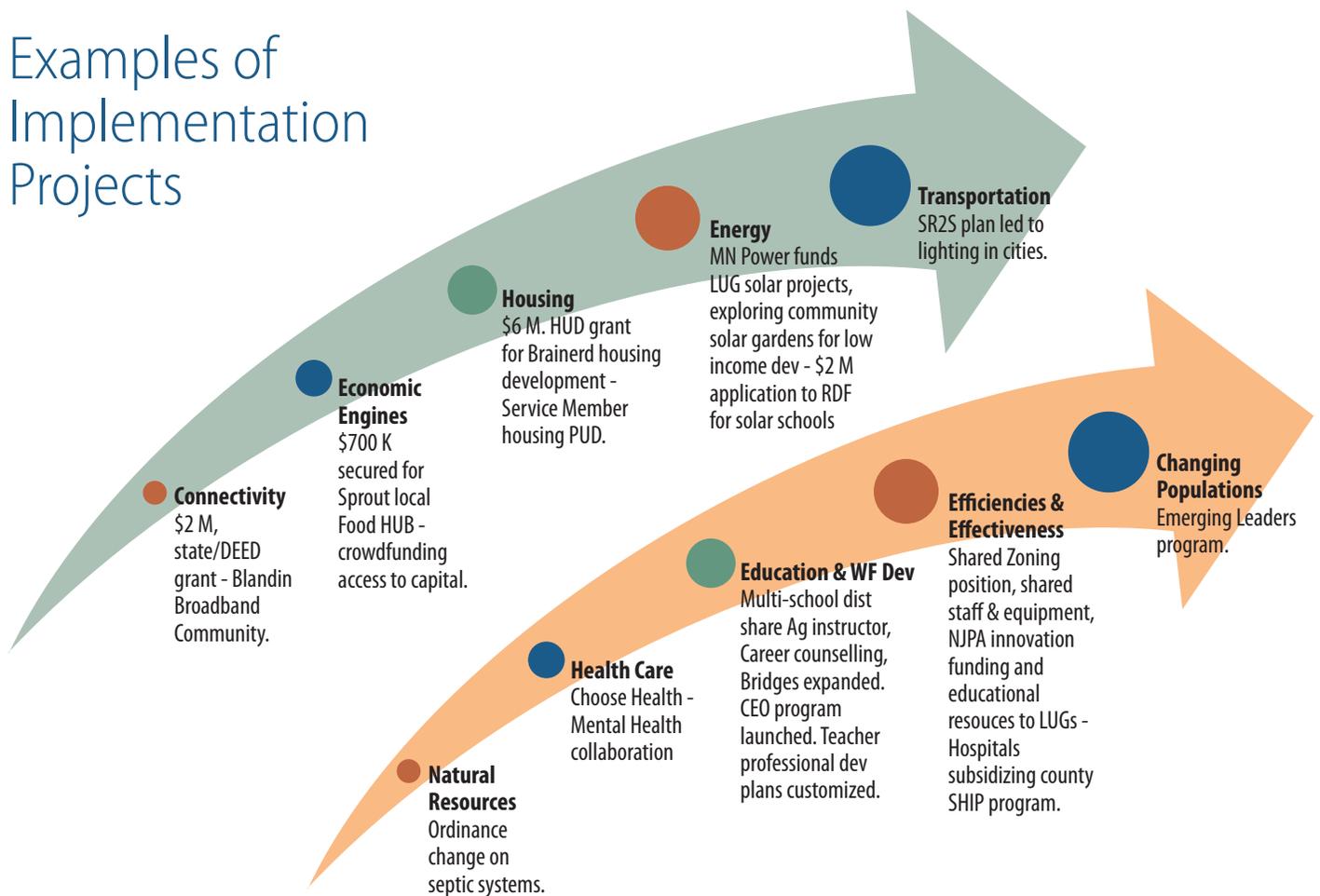
In between the meetings, Champions from each theme area work on projects aimed at reaching our goals. It is truly within the theme areas that the work is being done.



IMPORTANT to note that since we began the Champion meetings, other regional leaders have asked how to become involved. What began with 33 Champions and Ex-Officios is now up to over 50 regional leaders from all sectors. They see potential benefit to how the work is getting done and who is “carrying the water”. They appreciated that implementation was delivered through a “Distributed Leadership” 🗨 model.

The region has just begun to think about the impacts of our implementation. We have clearly come to realize that typical economic indicators really DO NOT answer any of the broader impact questions. When we say we created jobs, which is a typical economic

# Examples of Implementation Projects



development success indicator, we don't know if they are livable wage jobs and for what populations. When we report millions of dollars leveraged, we haven't assessed whether or not those investments impact quality of life for ALL residents. In addition, economic development success indicators don't address all the areas that make or destroy a region's desire to become a livable place. It can't be jobs at the cost of water quality (as an example). A portion of the detailed "Sprout evaluation" gives an example of how we define success in a way that goes beyond the economic success indicators.

The power of ten themes all working together is how we move beyond our "silos" to recognize how our work impacts the work of others. The dollars raised and what makes us unique, we were told by Minnesota Housing Finance (for example), is because this is a regional-integrated approach. The reason our Champions continue to come back and work with us is because the regional-integrated approach is making a difference.

A few comments as to why this regional integrated approach is important to our Champions are:

## What keeps you coming back?

**Todd Holman**, Program Director, The Nature Conservancy, *"The first chunk of my work is with the Nature Conservancy; in the evening I am a commissioner on the Baxter City Council. I represent the Natural Resources and Development Patterns Theme. I have been the benefactor and can testify for the value of regional awareness. It has been very helpful in our work. I leave here energized and informed. I leave here with more than I bring. I thank you all for that."*

**Andrea Lauer**, Mayor of Royalton, *"The plan and implementation—we have been part of planning and planning and planning. What keeps me coming back is this group gets stuff done. Every one of the 11 themes touches my city in some way that I can take back to my city. It is an invaluable learning experience and I can't thank you enough for that."*

But where are we now, January 2016? Our core team and those who have been in charge of leading many of the theme areas took time to reflect. We all wondered if the Champion model was still working. We were concerned about burn out. We talked about re-energizing ourselves and our Champions. We wondered about Resilient Region 2.0 – and what we needed to do next to build on success, but to address areas such as decision making to make sure it moves beyond being “included” to inclusive decision making. We used the January 2016 Champion meeting to have all the Champions reflect on what is working, what isn’t, and where we go from here. ***A complete transcript of their responses may be found in Appendix B.***

### Questions we asked the Champions:

#### “Is this work still important to the region? Why? Or Why not?”

**Greg Bergman**, Director of the Small Business Development Center, *“This issue is still important to the region as we hope a stronger environment for economic growth is part of our future to provide opportunities for our citizens to be self-sufficient in the communities they want to call home.”*

**Joe Buttweiler**, Partnership Development Manager at CTC, *“In 2004 CTC first partnered in the Brainerd ISD. Until that time CTC hadn’t reached out extensively seeking to work on major projects benefitting the community! The Champion meetings afford CTC an opportunity to be an active community participant to seek ways to expand the value we provide within the community.”*

#### “What keeps you coming back to the Champion meetings?”

**Keith Olander**, Dean of Agriculture at CLC *“I believe collaboration is vital to our sustainability and competitiveness. Networking throughout the region is key to my and our success long-term.”*

**DeAnn Barry**, Executive Director at The Center, *“To share how we are making a difference in the changing population’s area, mainly the aging demographics. To network with others; find out how we all are working in our community to make the changes that we see that are needed. Opportunities not difficulties.”*

### When considering the work your theme group is doing to carry out the recommendations from the Resilient Region Plan:

#### Are we getting the work done?

Yes, because ...

**Bob McLean**, COO of Hunt Utilities Group, *“People are working together; people expanding the collaborative effort; even early resisters or unengaged are warming to the idea as they see the effectiveness of the collaborative effort.”*

**Pam Mahling**, (Special Projects and Development Associate) Honor the Earth, *“We’ve made great progress toward 95% broadband, laid a good groundwork for future building, and working on adoption via Blandin BBC project.”*

No, because ...

**Jennifer Bergman**, Executive Director of Brainerd HRA *“The goals and recommendations are very wide in range and sometimes difficult to implement Region-wide. i.e. zoning and ordinance changes; not communicating among our team.”*

**Peggy Kennedy**, President at MN State Community and Technical College, *“Resources are limited and we would like a model that focuses on all students, not just a select few/handful.”*

One of our initial guiding principles was - Quality of Life for all in the region.

Please help us understand WHO is ultimately being impacted by our work?

**Tim Houle**, Crow Wing County Administrator, *"Pretty broad cross section; low income, seniors, schools, counties....."*

**Jill Abbott**, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at MN State Community & Technical College, *"Youth, low income, seniors, under employed, employers."*

Who should we be targeting to improve our impacts?

**Molly Zins**, Executive Director for U of M Sustainable Development Partnership, *"If we effectively partner with more under-represented community groups, impacts will be more broadly owned and realized across all of our communities."*

**Mike Larson**, COO at Essentia Health, *"Business, work force, legislators"*

**Peggy Stebbins**, Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Cuyuna Medical Center, *"Community Leaders, politicians"*

Of the 36 who attended the meeting and 3 others who responded via email or other means, 32 are willing to continue to serve as a Champion. Many suggestions on ways to improve the Champion meetings emerged from the surveys, small group discussions and core team meetings. In the future, we will try an alternative way to give our 2-minute reports and use *"Open Space Technology"* to better identify ways to work across themes.

## 4. Lessons Learned

In our reflection over the past and present we have identified the ingredients that make our work successful:

### Lessons Learned: Why did it work?

#### Ingredients

- > Trust
- > Galvanizing Issue
- > Individuals & Organizations: Broadbased & Open to Change
- > Flexibility in plans & processes
- > \$\$\$
- > Systems Thinking
- > Respected Anchor Organization
- > Stewards

#### Ethic/Culture

- > Collaboration to the core
- > "Regional" Vision
- > Accountability to each other & Region
- > Triple bottom line
- > Interconnectedness/cross pollinator
- > Inclusiveness

## Ingredients

- > **Trust-** Trust between key leaders and organizations.
- > **Galvanizing Issue:** The economy and development pressure on environment for us.
- > **Individuals & Organizations: Needed to be** broad-based and open to change.
- > **Flexibility:** By all in plans and process. Plan, Do, Learn, Adjust.
- > **\$\$ Resources:** Some dollars to pay for the core team's time.
- > **Systems Thinking:** The systems approach to our work includes both understanding of and value for the interdependence of the many sectors or factors contributing to healthy, viable, sustainable communities. Systems thinking incorporates all of the sectors needed for the larger system, recognizes the influence each will have and fosters a process in which each contributes to the whole. Practicing systems thinking moves the work past the human constructs or boundaries that might otherwise impede the interaction needed for creating whole community benefits.
- > **Respected anchor organization.** In our case, it was that trusted staff from the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) who were respected in the region. R5DC Commissioners selected coordination of the Resilient Region plan as an organizational strategic priority and dedicated a minimum of at least 4 staff to participate with other Champions in the Resilient Region process.
- > **Champions – often also called “Stewards.”** Existence of catalysts/motivators/ agitators/instigators (local core team); “true believers” who have courage, optimism, shared beliefs and ownership. Stewards aren’t just leaders; they are special leaders committed to the long term wellbeing of their communities. They have a 360 degree vision, take an integrated approach, and build coalitions for action. They are risk-takers. They are passionate and energetic. They are people of vision. They are the “keepers of the flame”. They have a common value set:

## Ethic/Culture

- > Collaboration to the core.
- > “Regional” vision.
- > Accountability to each other & region.
- > Triple bottom line: Economy and Environmental vitality and quality of life for all.
- > See value in interconnectedness – gaining insight from others – breaking out of their “silos” and being inclusive.
- > It is important to have everyone at the table. “No single organization or person, however innovative or influential, could accomplish our goals alone” became our mantra.



CTC technicians reviewing engineering maps in the field.



Sprout biodiesel truck delivers CSA shares to Lakewood Health.



Close-up of the Photovoltaic panels on the roof of Sprucewood Townhomes.

# 5. Impact: More than just 44 million raised to help the region become resilient ...

In the “impact”, we will highlight six case stories. All have been successful. Some are showing direct impact on the “lowest” levels. Some are more comprehensive in their impact. For example, leaders moving forward the progress of our local food hub “Sprout” have been most successful in honoring our guiding principles and making a difference for poor families and growers in the region. The Connectivity theme story has many elements of success – but it also has difficult lessons learned and much work remains to truly honor inclusive decision making. These stories help to illustrate what our impacts have been, as well as the work that remains to help all our themes reach this level of success. We are doing this not only to share our true story with others but also to help all our theme Champions celebrate success and critically reflect on the future and next steps to be taken.

The following are five summaries of Appendices A: Full Case Studies, where we document the impacts from specific incidences of the Resilient Region work:



## 1. Strengthening Broadband Access in the Region

With the support from our regional purchasing alliance cooperative, The National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA), our region has invested over \$200,000 in the past 2 years in engineering studies needed to prepared State and National grant applications and coordination of other activities of our Resilient Region Virtual Highway Taskforce, a subgroup within the Resilient Region Connectivity Theme area.

Along with the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development investment of \$3 million in our region, a total of **\$7.72 Million** has been invested to expand broadband infrastructure. **With the initial 4.2 million investment (2014-2015), the Resilient Region helped Minnesota reach high-Speed internet goals.** The statewide goals for high-speed internet is 10 Mbps download and 5 Mbps upload. Our first broadband project included:

- > Fairview Township – 146 drops/contracts – low income rural
- > Fort Ripley – 265 drops/contracts – low income rural

### Additional impacts:

- > **Increased Access to High-Speed Internet. 298 houses** have subscribed to the high-speed internet service available now through CTC.
- > **\$4,422,100 (73.5%) for labor:** High-skill telecommunications company strengthened and high-skill employees retained in the region.
- > **Fairview Township Able to Respond to Emergencies.** 🗨️
- > **Internet Users. High-Skill/High-Wage Jobs Retained in the region.** *“I’ve shared many of our success stories, but there is a recent event that happened which was really appreciated by our team. One of the customers in Fairview Township that took a gig of service from us (our first gig residential customer) telecommutes for Microsoft. He is now doing all of his work from his home in Fairview Township. He was paying over \$600 a month for wireless data through AT&T. He now pays \$200 for our gig internet. He is thinking he might buy another gig sometime soon,”* stated Kristie Westbrook, COO, CTC.
- > LLBO Wireless Telecommunications Business



CTC installing a network ONT at the customer premise.

- > **Increased Access & Skills:** 50 LLBO Low Income Families
- > The Shop (Youth Defined Space in Brainerd MN)
- > **Increased Access & Skills:** 72 Low Income Families
- > **Reduced Electronic Waste:** 3000 pounds of electronic waste were recycled in 2015
- > **Workforce Development in High-Tech Skills:** 1 VISTA member, 2 youth from Rural MN CEP Youth Services and 7 youth from alternative schools who participate each semester on Thursday from 9 to 11 developing workplace skills and learn how to refurbish computers

**Low-income seniors and students gain access.** Through the support from the Blandin Foundation, 50 low-income families will gain access to PC4People computers. These will be distributed to the low-income youth at The Shop in Brainerd and Leech Lake Tribal College. These groups will now have the potential to develop marketable high-tech skills.



CTC working in the field at the area cabinet.



## 2. Sprucewood Project

The Resilient Region goal is to increase affordable housing in the region, especially in the Baxter area where, in 2012, Zach Tagar, a University of Minnesota researcher, estimated that 2,254 Affordable Housing Units were needed.

- > At any given time, we have 34 families living at Sprucewood Townhomes. This totals approximately 93 people (including kids, significant others, etc.) with a household size averaging 2.7 people.
- > Provide housing options to the homeless population. Sprucewood incorporated 4 Long Term Households - these households would truly be stabilized during their tenancy if they followed the rules and were not evicted (which has happened).
- > Assist with the foreclosure crisis. The property purchased for Sprucewood Townhomes was a foreclosed piece of land.
- > Increase energy efficiency and strengthen the emerging renewable energy industry in the region. In the Sprucewood Townhome project, solar panels were provided by a local renewable energy nonprofit RREAL.
- > The project included a city trail along property, as well as the Mental Health Hospital that adjoins this property to complete that trail to the city wetlands behind the buildings.
- > CMHP adopted the Green Standards from MN Housing, which was also part of the RR plan.

**Low Income residents** found homeownership and the project increased all forms of wealth creation of: built, individual, financial, intellectual, political, natural, social and cultural assets.



Above: Exterior of Sprucewood Townhomes.

Below: Interior picture of the lower level kitchen, dining room and part of the living room.





### 3. Addressing Energy Poverty

R5DC has been awarded a grant of \$1,993,660 from Xcel Energy to develop solar energy projects at multiple school sites in our region. The total amount of solar to be developed in these projects is 1,493.76 kilowatts of DC nameplate capacity, using equipment made in Minnesota by tenKsolar. These systems would produce at least 1,858,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of clean energy in the first year and 42 million kWh over 25 years.

Participating schools have also expressed strong interest in using these solar facilities as “living laboratories” that would be integrated into STEM curricula.

#### ***Project Goals and Objectives***

- > Install total of 1,493 kilowatts of solar capacity
- > Demo coordinated regional strategy for solar development
- > Build regional capacity for further solar development
- > Save schools money on energy costs over time
- > Create “living labs” for STEM-based curriculum
- > Strengthen relationship with utility providers where possible

#### ***Specific benefits to school districts***

It is important to not understate that the intent of this project, with all of the participating schools, is to deliver a STEM-based curriculum that will add value at the K-12 sites and build upon the already fantastic energy related programs at the Leech Lake Tribal College and K-12 participating schools.

- > Turn-key solar facility for \$5,000 capital cost
- > Solar energy at discounted rate for 20 years
- > Platform for future renewable energy projects

#### ***LLBO Tribal College added value***

HIRE college students from the Leech Lake Tribal College who have graduated from the renewable energy courses and onto the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) (our design, engineering and construction firm) crews. These are well paying jobs that will build a resume and potential opportunities for LLTC students. R5DC and other partners are committed to additional efforts that reduce barriers to LLTC students to participate in this program such as transportation, day care etc.

#### ***Community impacts***

Given that between 40-60% of the children in K-12 schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch and poverty rates within the region continue to be high, we anticipate that the energy savings to schools will have a direct impact to schools’ budgets and a ripple effect to tax payer residents.



Above and below: First community solar array in Minnesota, built by RREAL.





## 4. Transportation: Safe Routes to Schools

The Resilient Region Transportation theme Champions commissioned an **Active Transportation Policy study** which reviewed the current active transportation policies for each of the five county seat cities throughout the region. **The study compared and contrasted the cities active transportation policies and made observations as well as recommendations regarding policy changes.**

**Prudent Use of Tax Payer Resources.** Just as in planning, the Resilient Region Transportation theme Champions are active in coordinating with state and local partners to bring transportation plans to the point of implementation expeditiously. **One way the Resilient Region Transportation theme Champions are doing this is by working as a liaison between MnDOT and local units of government to review the MnDOT Districts 10 Year plan to identify any potential changes to the projects planned in years 5-10 of the 10 year plan. By doing this review in years 5-10, we can avoid changes to projects in years 1-4 when project changes are more apt to lead to project cost overruns and or time delays.** (Intended beneficiary? The local and state tax payers).

**Additional Benefits – Safe Transit for Children.** The Transportation Champions have been instrumental in developing Safe Routes to Schools plans for schools within the Region Five area. **Plans for four communities that included 8 schools have been written since 2012, which has indicated how 2727 students travel to and from school.** These plans are designed to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school through planning efforts that improve safety and access for children. Schools, in partnership with cities or counties have the opportunity to qualify for funding to make these improvements under the Safe Routes to School infrastructure grant.



## 5. Choose Health

### Addressing needs of Low-income Food Insecure Families

The Choose Health model has high rates of retention and improvements for food insecure families, as well as producers in the region.

During Phase I, there were 339 families that were initially screened, with 66 families identified as food insecure. Of those 66 families, 51 agreed to participate in the Choose Health program, alongside 40 families who participated on a regular basis. This is unlike other similar programs (Veggie RX funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation) where there were no families/participants who remained active at the end of the program. Choose Health retained 31 families at the end of Phase I. They were then asked to move onto Phase II. Recruitment of an additional 19 families was completed for a total of 50 families in Phase II.

Data showed an increase in participants who rated their health as good or better of 14%, as well as an increase in fruit and vegetable consumption, better eating habits, improved skills in preparing, planning and shopping for healthier food options, 29% improved blood pressure, 3% improved BMI, and 46% gained access to resources such as MNCare, Energy Assistance Program, SNAP, WIC, and Earned Income Tax Credit.

**Low Income Growers:** In year one, during both the summer and winter seasons, low income growers received approximately \$16,000 for locally grown commodities to fill the Community Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) requests.

### For the Region:

- > The Choose Health program is one of several regional initiatives that is growing the region's local food economy and increasing access to health food options for disadvantaged populations.



CSA shares ready for pick-up.

- > Choose Health was made possible by an innovative partnership model that leveraged knowledge and resources from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to provide fresh food to the area's most food insecure population. NADO awarded Choose Health with their annual "Innovation Award" at the 2014 training conference in Denver Colorado. Choose Health was also recognized by the Small Hospital category through the Minnesota Hospital Association and a Health Partners Innovation Award in 2015. The Bush Foundation recently awarded Choose Health with an Innovation Award for \$500,000 to expand the Choose Health Program and other initiatives directly related to local food production.
- > The sustainability of this program was established through new IRS rulings that impact investments in programs like Choose Health.
- > Choose Health is being replicated in other regional hospitals, such as St. Gabriel's Hospital in Little Falls and CentraCare in Long Prairie, as well as through an RCDI grant received by Happy Dancing Turtle, working with one physician in Pine River.

For more information, please see the Sprout Case Study, found in Appendix B. **The evaluation for Sprout** provides an example of how we evaluate our work and how this goes beyond the economic indicators of success.

We have used, as a framework, the Eight Forms of Wealth (in summary):



Carolyn McQueen prepares produce preparation and taste-testing demonstration.

1. **Built Capital** is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
2. **Financial capital** is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.
3. **Individual capital** is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in region.
4. **Intellectual capital** is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region.
5. **Natural capital** is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region.
6. **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.
7. **Social capital** is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society.
8. **Cultural capital** is the stock of practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity.