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*cultivating collaboration*

## FIVE YEAR REPORT

Read Now



**Region Five Development Commission**

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Staples, MN 56479

## OUR REGION

Our region is a rural and small town area with a population of over 163,000 in 68,840 households spread over an area of 3,996,051 acres. The five-county area is blessed with an abundance of business, industry, cultural and natural resources. It includes plains, prairies, forests, and the Mississippi River weaving throughout. Tourism is one of the major economic engines and our region is referred to as the Central Lakes Region due to the abundance of lakes. Other important industries include technology services, advanced manufacturing, healthcare and energy resources. Extensive trail systems, including the 120-mile Paul Bunyan Trail, and the world reknown Cuyuna Recreational Area, provide unique outdoor experiences for young and old alike.





## LEADERSHIP & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### Establishment

The Establishment of Regional Development Commissions (RDCs) were organized by local elected officials as authorized by the Minnesota Regional Development Act of 1969. The Act defines the boundaries, membership, operating principals and the specific duties and powers of an RDC. There are nine Regional Development Commissions in Minnesota covering 63 counties. Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) was established in 1973.

### Purpose

The purpose of a RDC is "to insure the orderly and harmonious coordination of state, federal and local comprehensive planning and development programs for the solution of economic, social, physical and governmental problems of the state and its citizens..." RDCs provide a variety of technical assistance services to the local units of government based on the individual needs of their region. They partner with numerous state and federal agencies, obtaining and administering grants for programs and projects at the local level, and are recognized for their fiscal responsibility and capabilities in professional program management.

### Commission

The work of the Commission is guided by a governing body that consists of 24 members representing a cross-section of constituents from around the region. Members of the Commission include representatives from county government, small and large cities, townships, school boards, higher education, emerging leader, Leech Lake Tribal Council, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

### Governing Board

RDC board membership is comprised of elected officials from townships, cities, counties, school boards, and public interest groups per statute 462.388.

### Funding

The Commission is funded from a variety of sources. The seed funding that sustains R5DC's activities year after year is a tax levy, which is set by the State of Minnesota. Levy dollars are used by the Commission to leverage some of the budget. On a typical year, we are 25% levy funded and 75% grant funded. We have had a couple years (2019 & 2021) where we had large projects such as Solar Schools and EDA CARES RLF funding, which resulted in skewed percentages.

### OUR MISSION

To enhance the vitality and quality of life for all people in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties by bridging relationships and resources.

# OUR VALUES

## DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES

We act as a dynamic, **forward-thinking** organization, constantly working in a state of change. When appropriate, we stimulate activities, change or progress. We carry a positive energy and attitude and work efficiently to solve problems. We demonstrate competency and proficiency in community and economic development practices. This enables us to meet the evolving needs of our communities.

## COLLABORATION

We value **authentic partnerships**, innovation and teamwork. We establish alliances with organizations that align with our mission. We work in cooperation as a team and with diverse groups to promote and manage projects and programs. We share in our dedication and commitment to each other and strive to support one another in reaching our full potential, both professionally and personally.

## GROWTH

We focus on building economic prosperity and success in our region and strive to establish **equitable economic ecosystems**. We promote, encourage and provide opportunities for development, leadership and mentoring. We promote continuous learning in our organization and invest in opportunities to enhance our growth through knowledge and practice.

## INTEGRITY

We are **accountable** to the public, our funding agencies and to each other for the quality of our work, promoting development of the region and being fiscally responsible. We expect professionalism to be demonstrated in our behavior and our conduct. We value timely, open and honest communication.

## INTENTION

The work of our team and the inclusive nature of our programs are planned, purposeful, and deliberate. We **value and respect the diversity** of our region, all of its people, our partners and our organization. We understand uniqueness and recognize differing viewpoints, and we respond in a balanced, flexible and open-minded way.



## OUR STAFF

RSDC employs nine full-time staff members, and usually works with one or two student interns and/or Volunteer VISTAs at any given time, along with consultants as needed.

The individuals who make up our team at RSDC and NCEDA have a diverse set of strengths and passions that are drawn upon and uplifted to do our best work. Learning on our supportive and gifted partners, we work together to collaborate – not compete – in order to best serve our region at large.

### OUR VISION

*To contribute, through planning and implementation of projects and programs, to a sustainable and prosperous regional economy, environment, and quality of life for all.*

**Bridging Relationships & Resources**



Cheryl Lee Hill  
Executive Director



Paul Erickson  
Regional Development Planner



Doree Eick  
Sr. Regional Development Planner



Beth Hendry  
Regional Development Planner



Amy Lipson  
Coordinator



Angela Anderson  
Budgeting Director



Matt Erickson  
Regional Development Planner



Stephanie Kinney  
Budgeting Coordinator



Emily Ruffalo  
Regional Development Planner



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

*"Today's accomplishments were yesterday's impossibilities."*  
- Robert H. Schuller



### dashboard: by the numbers

**32 groups**, made up of **398 people**, completed IDI assessments with **146 individuals** holding one-on-one sessions for personal profile review under [Welcoming Communities initiative](#)  
**2 Team Learning Journeys**

Covering **3 States** (VT, NH, KY) and **16 Cities**

**Ongoing Local Foods initiatives** to support growers & healthy residents in our region

**4 Comprehensive Plans** impacting **19,142 residents**

**6 Safe Routes to School plans** for **12,469 students**

**2 New Military Connected Programs** - VetCSA and Regional Military and Veteran Exchange



## SOLAR SCHOOLS PROJECT

The largest scattered site solar project for schools in Minnesota, and a model for rural scattered site solar development, RSDC partnered with 4 electric utility companies/co-ops, 2 school districts, a community college, an energy equity firm and a \$1.9 million-dollar grant from Xcel Energy's Renewable Development Fund for a \$3.5 million

project to develop 6 solar PV systems, totaling 15MW in central MN. This project has saved schools thousands a month on their energy bill and delivers STEAM curriculum to enhance student learning. The Solar Schools project generated an estimated \$7.8 million of economic activity in the region. Learn more at [regionfive.org/solar-schools](http://regionfive.org/solar-schools)



### dashboard: by the numbers

**\$1.9 million dollar** Xcel Energy Renewable Development Grant  
**\$3.5 million dollar** project

**6 solar PV systems** for 2 school districts & 2 community college campuses

**\$7.8 million** of economic activity in the region



## equity action guide for rural communities



## AGENCY WIDE

*Focused on partnerships, projects, and program management.*

Since 2010, Region Five Development Commission has received an Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) in 2011, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. Recent awards have been received for The Good Life...for ALL! Campaign, Solar Schools Project, VetCSA/RxCSA Programs, and Rural Energy and Environment Planning.

In 2018, R5DC hired a marketing director, leading the way for rebranding with a new logo and website. Dedicated to sharing our story, we added [Deep Dive with Region Five](#) podcast as a tool to share more about our program offerings.

In 2019, we added volunteer hours as an employee benefit and our staff has

contributed over 300 hours of community service in the region.

In 2021, we published the [Rural Communities Equity Action Guide](#). This action guide was created by Mónica María Segura-Schwartz, Katie Pierson, and Jane Leonard of Growth & Justice with the support of the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) staff and the Equitable Economics Ecosystem project team members.

We continue to provide assistance with the following: community surveys; grant, loan and contract administration; grant writing guidance; workshops; pandemic planning; other general planning, facilitation and inclusive public participation projects and programs.



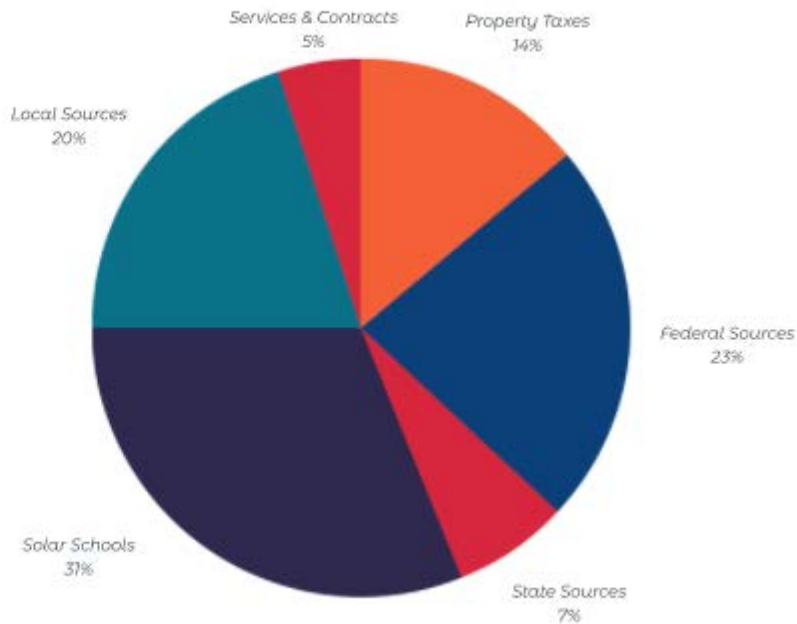
## FINANCIALS | REVENUE

The finance department of R5DC is responsible for preparing annual budgets, commissioning an annual audit, processing monthly and quarterly billing, processing payroll, as well as fiscal management of grants and contracts. The finance department is also responsible for the secure maintenance of financial records and acting as the fiscal agent for the North Central Economic Development Association (NCEDA).

This is a snapshot of 2017-2021 fiscal year revenue.

### dashboard: by the numbers

<b>\$1,619,373</b>	Property Taxes
<b>\$2,597,417</b>	Federal Sources
<b>\$ 852,416</b>	State Sources
<b>\$3,568,393</b>	Solar Schools
<b>\$2,247,610</b>	Local Sources
<b>\$ 603,258</b>	Charges for Services/Contracts
<b>\$ 30,320</b>	Miscellaneous (less than 1%)



## FINANCIALS | EXPENSES

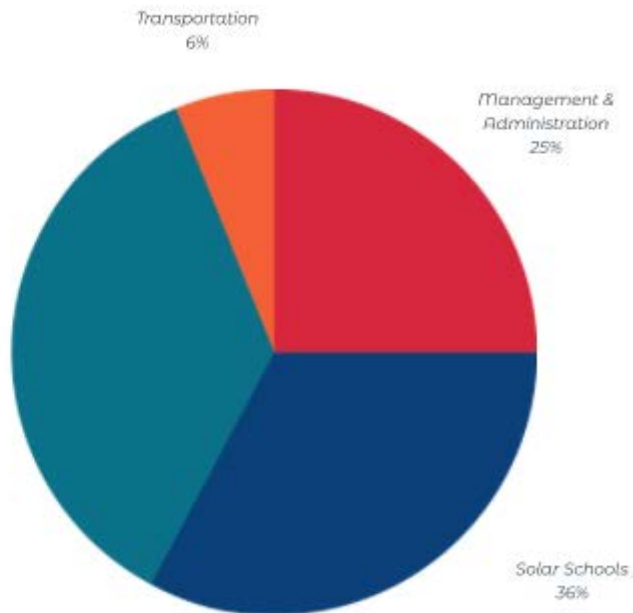
*Financial Update: We streamlined our accounting software with the discontinuation of project accounting and implementing new chart of accounts. It took a couple years to officially get rid of project accounting and fully rely on our new chart of accounts. It is more efficient, clear and concise, and less time consuming.*

*This is a snapshot of 2017-2021 fiscal year expenses.*

Economic & Community  
Development  
33%

### dashboard: by the numbers

\$2,480,562	Management & Administration
\$3,230,363	Economic & Community Development
\$3,467,068	Solar Schools
\$ 562,052	Transportation





## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

*Community Supported Agriculture Program for Veterans, Creative Placemaking at Sprout, and Energy & Environment Planning in the Region, and more!*

Community development is a broad term applied to the practices and academic disciplines of civic leaders, involved citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of local communities; ultimately to improve quality of life in our local communities.

Region Five Development Commission and North Central Economic Development Association accomplish this by providing technical assistance, resources, and information. In addition, information is available in topic areas such as comprehensive planning, local foods, military connections, welcoming communities and watershed planning. The range of community development

initiatives is extremely broad, working to especially serve those that are traditionally under-served. Programs to bring people together, to promote community spirit and to bridge differences are interwoven into the work we do.

Notable projects over the last five years include: the Creative Placemaking initiative at Sprout with funding from Artplace America, our VetCSA and RxCSA programs - bringing fresh, locally grown food to veterans and their families, and those experiencing mental illness, and the Energy and Environment planning initiatives that have taken place and are ongoing - from the Solar Schools project to integration into Comprehensive Plans.

## dashboard: by the numbers

**\$57,200** dollars leveraged

**3,750** acres of land

**30,650** pounds of food

**25,542** meals to fill the missing meal gap

**51** growers

**50+** veterans served



## VETCSA

*Community Supported Agriculture for our region's veterans and their families.*

In 2019, RSDC applied for a grant through the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, Support our Troops License Plate fund for a project called "VetCSA." RSDC was awarded \$94,700 to supply 50 low-income veterans and widows of veterans in our five-county region with twice monthly Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes of locally grown produce as well as monthly cooking demonstrations from a local professional chef and nutrition education provided by the University of MN Extension. There were three pick up sites throughout our region for the veterans to pick up their shares and obtain the education or specific demo for the month.

This project allowed participants to foster a sense of autonomy and confidence in being able to make decisions that benefit one's health and well-being and lend themselves to skills attainment, and deeper integration into support systems to continue to build a structure of trust, relationships and networks.

The VetCSA program was delivered through a partnership of Sprout MN our region's food hub, the County Veteran Service Officers and RSDC. Our shared commitment to provide the CSA

shares of locally grown foods (aggregated from over 100 low income farmers) and HIGH touch communication and referral services to 50 the low-income Veteran's was very well received.

Relationships were formed during the CSA pick up, recipes were shared and various methods of preparing the same produce were discussed. Several participants expressed they looked forward to CSA pick up day because it gave them an excuse to get out of their house and they were excited to see what new items they would be receiving.

Several success stories were shared when participants expressed they had never tried a certain vegetable due to not knowing what it was or how to prepare it and not wanting to waste the money. By providing the CSA boxes at no cost to the veteran, this allowed the veteran and widows new opportunities to try new things without fear or guilt of discarding it if they did not care for it. Though much to the surprise of some, not only had they not ever tried something (cabbage, for example) but they discovered they loved it and were now adding it to their regular grocery list.



## dashboard: by the numbers

18 indoor markets, featuring 40+ vendors at each market  
 7 Special Events, including Minced Cooking Competitions, Summer Harvest Dinners, and Parties for a Purpose  
 15 business workshops for growers and makers  
 Shared the talent of over 75 local artists (visual, culinary, musical, and movement)  
 7000+ residents and visitors engaged in Artplace funded events and activities at Sprout  
 Collected over 50 stories from local residents from diverse lived experiences

## ARTPLACE AMERICA & SPROUT MARKETPLACE

*Sprout believes that food, art, and culture are core and integrated in the promotion of health, sustainability, and vitality. Sprout works to connect these elements in ways that increase healthy food access, encourage entrepreneurship, and cultivate creativity.*

In the fall of 2016, RSDC was a recipient of an Artplace America grant to expand the impact of Sprout MN in Little Falls, which was constructed in 2014. Sprout MN is a 20,000 square foot local food processing facility, cooking demonstration kitchen and indoor winter marketplace for growers and makers, established by a cadre of doers and thinkers who hosted its grand opening April 1, 2016.

The Artplace America grant's focus was to improve the livelihoods of growers and makers, as well as connect to the various cultural groups within our region. This initiative showed that addressing economic prosperity can be done in ways that improve social cohesion, through the use of creative placemaking framework.

### Why does this matter?

A variety of art forms were brought

together to address economic development gaps that had mutually beneficial impacts. Artists partnered with local growers at Sprout Marketplace to increase access to broader customer base, which impacts ability to secure a livable wage for both. All activities improved our region's way of doing business, creating an improved ecosystem that collectively provides new experiences for residents to financially prosper, and welcome all residents to participate and learn from each other in ways that inspire future initiatives.

### How is this making a difference?

Social and cultural capital are important components of healthy communities. This initiative helped to build those capitals in ways that people could share and experience culture that celebrated, rather than shamed, diversity and curiosity.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The North Central Economic Development Association (NCEDA) is a local non-profit corporation established with federal and local dollars through the Region Five Development Commission. NCEDA's mission is to provide assistance to cultivate new skills and resources that unite communities and contribute to a prosperous economy.

We provide financial assistance with business lending and homeowner loans for septic and household well-water in the region, along with entrepreneurship opportunities for small-business owners, and technical assistance.

The U.S. Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Association identifies RSDC and the five counties served as an Economic Development District (EDD). As a designated EDD, RSDC is charged with the maintenance

and implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan. The CEDS outlines our region's priority economic development activities in light of issues and opportunities identified by the five county region. The CEDS incorporates resiliency, inclusion and best management practices throughout the goals and strategies. Visit [regionfive.org/ceds](http://regionfive.org/ceds).

In 2018, RSDC received a grant from the MN Department of Agriculture to provide technical assistance to small food retailers in Central MN. Workshops offered included topics such as business succession planning, technology, human resources, WealthWorks evaluation and grant writing. We also shifted to add a session on the intersection of food justice and racial justice. Visit [regionfive.org/afop](http://regionfive.org/afop) to learn more and view the sessions.



## AREAS OF IMPACT

These are target measures, set each year to give us a goal to reach in Economic Development and Lending, Community Development, and Transportation. These numbers share the impact of R5DC programs & NCEDA lending in our region over the last five years.

### dashboard: by the numbers

- 27 Gap business loans
- 23 Loans for micro business/entrepreneur lending
- 45 Small Business Emergency Loans
- 55 Individual septic treatment system loans
- 16 Loans for household well-water systems
- 46 Plans implemented for community development
- 38 Projects for community development
- 55 Grants written and submitted for funding

**32 technical assistance workshops with 729 attendees**

**\$5.2 million funded for business lending**

**193 jobs created**

**\$1.4 million funded for EDA Cares Act Revolving Loan Fund**

**\$106,097,647.00 Total Dollars Lent with Leveraged Dollars | NCEDA Inception to end of FY2021**



## CARES ACT FUNDING FOR BRAINERD FAMILY YMCA

*Providing child care and combatting food insecurity during the pandemic.*

In 2020, when the pandemic and the governor's mandatory shutdown closed the Brainerd Family YMCA's doors to their members, they opened them to families and youth requiring a full day of distance learning and daycare.

With the primary goal of supporting the families that needed them most, they chose to forego all fees and to provide free care for Tier 1 and Tier 2 families of essential service providers. For nine weeks, the staff provided support for distance learning, providing the highest quality experience, including STEM, social

emotional learning activities, leadership development, physical activity and so much more—through the end of the school year, though the Y was losing revenue through regular sources such as membership fees and program fees.

Partnering with the Outreach Program, the Brainerd Family YMCA staff and volunteers distributed meals at three locations to help combat some of the food insecurity in their area. By the end of the school year, **54,000 meals had been handed out.**

The mandates and restrictions

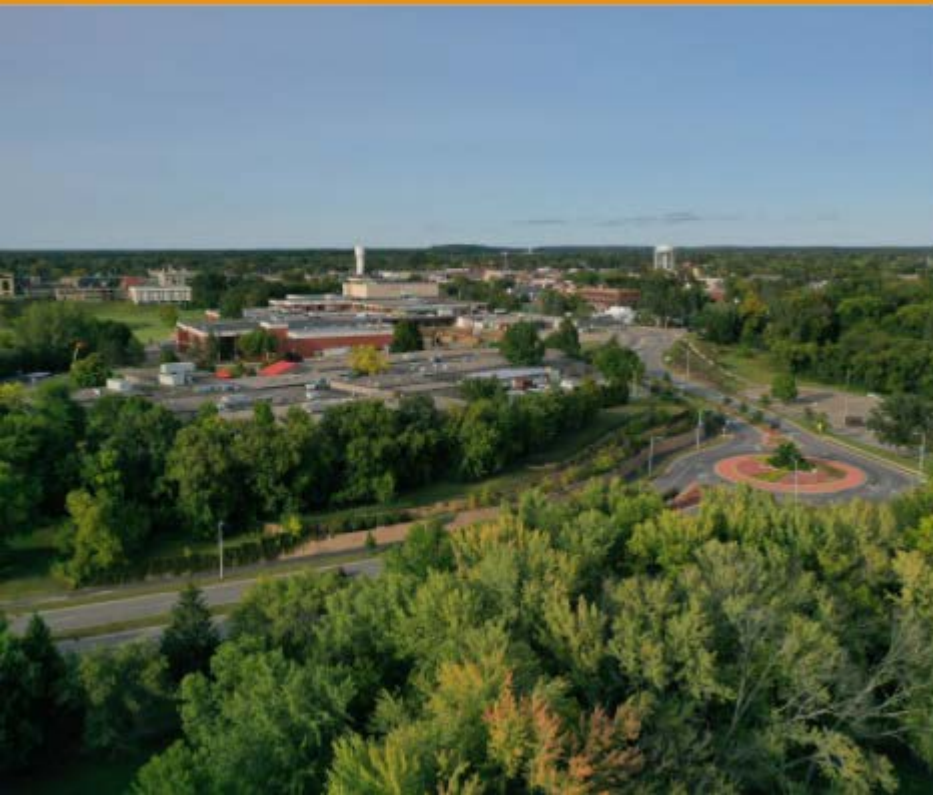
have impacted membership. The infusion of **\$250,000 in RSDC/NCEOR CARES Act RLF gap funding** ensures the sustainability of the Brainerd Family YMCA.

"This is game changing for us. Thank you so much to RSDC for working with the Y to help ensure that we are able to change lives today and into the future. There are great things to come, and you are helping us to get there. We are extremely grateful," says RYfle.

Photos at right submitted by YMCA and taken prior to mask mandate.







## TRANSPORTATION

*R5DC's Transportation Department acts as a liaison between local governments and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.*

Assistance is available to help local governments address transportation issues related to roads, transit, air, rail, trails, etc. The program helps identify and prioritize safety issues along highway corridors and provides staff support to a number of transportation related committees and efforts, including the R5DC Transportation Advisory Committee and the Area Transportation Partnership. Whether it's highway corridor planning, trail development, freight movement studies, or school transportation management planning, R5DC helps identify and solve regional transportation planning challenges.

### **Transportation Advisory Council (TAC)**

R5DC has a planning assistance contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) to provide assistance, information and technical support for transportation issues affecting the region. R5DC has a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) that meets 4 times a year to address various transportation issues. The TAC also prioritizes all transportation projects submitted in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena Counties proposed to use federal transportation funding through the Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). The TAC has funded an estimated **\$13.7 million in road projects** over the past five years. Learn more at [regionfive.org/transportation](http://regionfive.org/transportation).



## VOLUNTEER DRIVERS PLAY CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE REGION

In 2018, volunteer drivers in Minnesota provided more than 162,000 rides for older adults and other non-drivers, while organizations with volunteer driver programs served 76,779 people in 2018 and drivers covered more than 9.5 million miles. These volunteer drivers assisted people with access to healthcare and other essential community services and products.

Volunteer drivers are often overlooked in the world of transportation when in reality they play an extremely crucial role in how people get to and from places. Cass County is unique in the transportation world as they are the only County in Minnesota without a public transportation service. Many factors lead to this including how large and rural the County is as well as funding and ridership concerns.

Thankfully Faith in Action of Cass County is able to fill that void for many of the residents who do not own their own vehicle or are unable to drive due to personal reasons. Faith in Action of Cass County operates out of Hackensack, Minnesota and is a volunteer driver program that offers services to the residents of Cass County. Many people are unaware that this service exists until they are no longer able to drive and need to ask for help as was the case for Charlene Kiley who

was involved in a head on collision and sustained injuries that kept her from driving. "I think it gives us more freedom, it is very hard to ask for help, you don't realize what is out there until you go through something that I went through" stated Kiley. Faith in Action was able to help Charlene get to and from her medical appointments when she had limited or no other options.

As crucial as riders are to run a volunteer driver program, the driver may play an even bigger role. Caryl Allan is a volunteer driver for Faith in Action and had this to say when asked about her experience as a volunteer driver. "I love it, I love the people, it gives you a good feeling when I can go home thinking I just had the best day that I ever had." Drivers like Caryl help bring a joy of light to many of the people who may be in a tough or difficult spot in their life. When asked about the volunteer drivers, Kiley had this to say, "It takes it feel like it's another family."

The [Region Five Regional Transportation Coordination Council](#) or RSRTC continues to assist volunteer driver programs with recruitment and retention of drivers, help with increased marketing needs, and assistance with legislative policies that affect volunteer driver benefits because volunteer drivers play a HUGE role in the region.

# STRATEGIC PLAN

- Ensure Organizational Integrity
- Empower Communities to Support Quality of Life for All People
- Cultivate Regional Prosperity and Sustainability

The intent of the Strategic Plan is to provide a mechanism that can be used to continuously check in with, and align RSDC activities with, its mission while adapting to the changes and opportunities of a dynamic region. In order to accomplish this goal, the Commission understood that it had to address these "critical regional issues" effectively. It required a strategic plan to guide the work.

#### Measuring Success According to Our Values

Our organization leads the region in community and economic development efforts. To be a catalyst

for change, we needed to implement a framework that aligned with our values and our commitment to the people we serve. Our approach to rural wealth creation is rooted in making lasting change on a holistic level. The WealthWorks framework acts as our guide to creating lasting impacts and evaluating those efforts in eight forms of capital: Built, Financial, Individual, Intellectual, Natural, Political, Social, and Cultural. Some may consider this an "alternative" approach to fostering economic development, but our hopes is that this framework becomes the standard.



## OUR FUTURE

The past five years have been the most prolific period in the RSDCs history, gauged by our regional economic, environmental and social advancements. This report outlines the significant RSDC accomplishments that have positively impacted the region and leveraged a multitude of investments and relationships. There is no doubt that the complexity of rural is shifting due to Covid 19's economic wake and a better understanding of climate impacts and social inequities within our region.

Progress in our five county rural region is achievable through our intentional and continued focus on simultaneous advancement

of multiple forms of wealth that offer resiliency. We serve a variety of industries all with unique challenges and opportunities, but ultimately we serve people.

We meet our responsibility to enquire and act upon the systems that shape our region's future through various planning and implementation strategies. As we take a moment to reflect on the accomplishments and lessons learned from the last five years, we know that no matter the challenges ahead, through authentic partnerships that honor our strong rural spirit and stewardship we will rise to the occasion.

*Let's continue  
bridging  
relationships  
and resources  
together.*

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