



**Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy**

**UW
Extension**

Profiles of Best Practices

Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation for Community Economic Development

Community, County

Bayfield County

Area of Project Impact

Bayfield County

Population Affected

15,013 (plus approximately 14,000 non-residents)

Situation

The James River mill in Ashland, Wisconsin closed in March 1998. This closing dislocated 221 workers and dramatically impacted the region's economy. As a consequence of the plant closing, the county faced an obvious need for extensive economic development efforts but lacked the capacity to implement strategies for change.

Economic Development Strategies

The most critical goal for Bayfield County was to increase its organizational capacity to implement economic development strategies. For this reason, creation of an economic development corporation was identified as the county's primary goal. Creation of an economic development corporation was expected to build county capacity for economic development by concentrating resources and information to assist in attracting new businesses and supporting existing businesses in Bayfield County.

Implementation

As a consequence of the mill closing, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) applied to the Economic Development Administration for a Title IX Sudden and Severe Economic Dislocation grant. The grant was used to develop an economic diversification strategy for Ashland, Bayfield and Iron Counties. Using the grant award, each county developed a committee to review local, state and national trends, to analyze strengths and weaknesses of the local economy, and to develop economic development goals, strategies and activities.

Based on Bayfield's need for organizational capacity building, a Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation, Inc. (BCEDC) was created as a 501c6 non-profit corporation in the fall of 1999. In April 2000, a decision was made to hire a full time executive director to spearhead a number of projects. One key economic development initiative was the "Work Where You Play" campaign to attract business owners and individuals who vacation in Bayfield County to move to the area. Another key initiative involved surveying over 7,000 non-resident property and boat owners in Bayfield County to create a market analysis for business attraction. A business retention survey, targeting over 300 businesses in the county, was also performed. In addition, in the interest of the diversification and expansion of existing businesses, a survey of the arts sector of the economy will be conducted, since the arts sector represents approximately \$3,000,000 in direct annual revenues and local expenditures.

These main initiatives lead to other strategies. For instance, business expansion opportunities were uncovered through the existing business survey. Through the survey, it was discovered that the fruit growing industry in Bayfield County (involving 36 fruit farmers) represented estimated annual gross sales for 2002 of 1.25 million dollars; yet it utilized only one-third of its potential farming acreage. As a result of this discovery, a survey of fruit growers will be conducted to determine the potential for expanding farming operations and the initiative provides the opportunity for expanding existing area business.

Partners and Leadership

A broad group of county stakeholders participated in the development of the BCEDC. This group included a board of directors with a diversified range of skills and interests, town board members, chambers of commerce, various municipal representatives and representatives from the Red Cliff tribe.

Outcomes

Bayfield County now has the necessary mechanism to further develop and diversify the economy. BCEDC makes possible the development of a number of strategies to further existing business retention and expansion, recruitment of new businesses and the encouragement of entrepreneurship. BCEDC's efforts have resulted in several new businesses relocating to Bayfield County and an additional two businesses are considering relocation. For instance, the Iron River IGA is embarking on a major expansion, as is the White Winter Winery.

Contact

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