



**Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy**



Profiles of Best Practices

Building Community Capacity for Economic Development— The Northwoods Regional Development Group (NWRDG)

Community, County

Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida and Vilas counties

Area of Project Impact

Oneida County, Vilas, Lincoln, Forest and Langlade counties; Lac du Flambeau, Sakaogon Chippewa of Mole Lake and Forest County Potawatomi

Population Affected

118,114

Situation

Communities have historically competed with one another over business opportunities, despite the regional nature of economic development and the fact that cooperation offers opportunities to maximize locational advantages. In effect, economic development has often acted as a zero-sum gain for many areas.

Economic Development Strategies

Over a decade ago, northern Wisconsin communities, tribes and counties recognized the need for regional cooperation and began to create a framework for working together to market and develop the “Northwoods.” The Northwoods Regional Development Group (NWRDG) was created to foster cooperation among economic development partners to strengthen development efforts in Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida and Vilas counties.

Implementation

The creation of the NWRDG established a networking relationship among a number of local and countywide economic development professionals in order to share information and best practices and build capacity for economic development in the region. The group is founded on the belief that “what is good for one is good for another because the economies in the region are tied together.” NWRDG members meet quarterly to exchange resources, discuss issues of common concern and strategize regionally. In addition, NWRDG offers educational opportunities to economic development professionals, from business workshops and training sessions to guest speakers, featuring the Secretary of Tourism and former Governor McCallum. More importantly, NWRDG provides a framework for economic development professionals to come together and promote the region as a whole. Ultimately, the Northwoods Regional Development Group strives to strengthen the economy of five counties through a number of economic development strategies from expanding existing businesses to stimulating entrepreneurship by creating a regional identity. In effect, NWRDG markets the region by pooling resources and jointly seeking resources.

By effectively establishing a working network and regional identity, NWRDG has acted as the driving force for acquiring a multi-county technology zone designation in order to build regional economic development that both compliments and compounds sustainable investment. This designation will allow NWRDG to offer \$5 million in tax credits to invest in businesses to build the economy.

Partners and Leadership

NWRDG membership includes leaders from Oneida, Vilas, Lincoln, Forest, Langlade counties. This includes professionals from Oneida and Lincoln Economic Development Corporations, UW-Extension County offices in Oneida, Vilas and Forest counties, the Nicolet Area Technical Vocational College, the Northern Advantage Center

for Business and Industry, the North Central Regional Planning Commission, Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, USDA Rural Development and Wisconsin Department of Commerce.

Outcomes

NWRDG has built community capacity for economic development by creating a regional network to engage in regional strategies to grow the economy. Through the network, individuals acquire knowledge and skills, communities get more jobs, and the region benefits as a whole. Already there is an expectation that more than 1,600 jobs will be created by an applicant to the technology zone that NWRDG was so instrumental in acquiring.

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