

Rural Entrepreneurial Venture (REV) Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building in Southern Minnesota

By Don Macke with Pam Bishop

Southern Minnesota is a remarkable and diverse landscape ranging from farmlands to the world-famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester to manufacturing communities to vacation communities with forests and the Mississippi River. This region is served by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF). This foundation, in partnership with rural communities in this region of Minnesota, has launched an exciting and promising entrepreneur-led and ecosystem building initiative called the **Rural Entrepreneurial Venture** or REV.



Introduction

Across rural North America there is a drive to grow stronger and more vibrant economies and prosperous communities. In this **search for solutions** there is a growing collection of legacy (e.g., over 25 years old) and newer entrepreneur-focused development initiatives. The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) is both a legacy initiative given its deep roots in economic and business development, and a newer generation of rural community entrepreneurial ecosystem building initiatives. We are pleased that SMIF has chosen to employ our [e2 Entrepreneurial Development Framework](#). Our story of REV is organized into the following sections complementing our [Pathways to Rural Prosperity Podcast](#) with SMIF's Pam Bishop, Vice President of Economic Development and REV Initiative creator, leader, and community coach.

- Southern Minnesota
- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
- Hybrid Community Foundation and Regional Development Organization
- Minnesota's Initiative Foundations
- REV and Its Development Journey
- Top 10 Lessons Learned
- Innovations Between the First and Second Community Cohorts
- Additional Resources

“In the communities we have worked with, the Rural Entrepreneur Venture program has led to collaborative and creative initiatives. Building on existing community assets, the REV process has truly helped these communities establish a sustainable entrepreneurial culture. We are excited to now bring this exciting REV tool to additional communities in our region.”

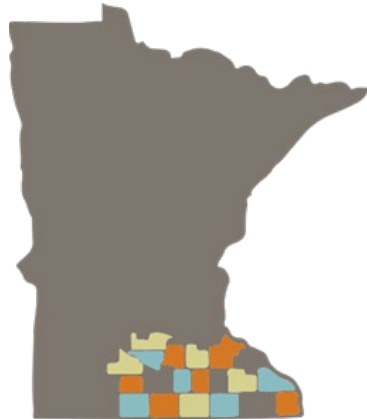


Tim Penny, CEO and President of SMIF

We begin our REV story journey by exploring the service area for the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF).

Southern Minnesota

We are defining Southern Minnesota as the service area of SMIF. SMIF serves the 20 counties of southern Minnesota. SMIF has provided more than \$121 million in grants, loans, and programming within the region since 1986. This is a vast and diverse landscape bounded on the east by the Mississippi River and Wisconsin, the Iowa Border to the south, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area in the north and the mid-line east and west in southern Minnesota.



It is home to thriving and challenged communities both large and small. Within this region are remarkable natural resource amenities including state forests, rivers and lakes and other recreational tourism assets.

There are rich farmlands in the central and western portions of this region and major hub cities with long legacies in manufacturing and other industrial activities. Parts of the region are impacted by the vibrant and growing Twin Cities (e.g., Minneapolis and St. Paul).

It is home to Rochester and the internationally recognized Mayo Clinic.

It is in this region that REV has focused its entrepreneurial ecosystem work.



Southeast MN is Home to Remarkable Lands

We continue our journey with additional background on the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF).

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation¹



The six Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) were created by McKnight Foundation in reaction to the 1980s farm crisis, the worst recession since the Great Depression. The MIFs, started as a “grand experiment,” have become an enormously powerful and valuable regional institution.

Today, SMIF’s mission and logo reflect our commitment to working toward a prosperous southern Minnesota by fostering a culture of collaboration. We are well known for our strong leadership, strategic focus, ability to leverage assets, and mission of building a prosperous and vibrant region. Since 1986, we have worked to identify and leverage our region’s assets to create economic prosperity and community vitality within our 20-county region.

2021 – SMIF Celebrating 35 Years

SMIF Vision for its Region

Southern Minnesota will be a prosperous and growing region with vibrant communities, innovative and successful economies, and engaged and valued citizens.

SMIF’s Mission

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation is a regional development and philanthropic organization that fosters economic and community vitality in 20 counties of southern Minnesota through a culture of collaboration and partnership.

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), a donor-supported foundation, invests for economic growth in the 20 counties of south central and southern Minnesota. SMIF’s key interests include economic and early childhood development and community vitality. We got our start in the farm crisis of the 1980s to help diversify Greater Minnesota economies and ensure vibrant communities for future generations. To learn more about SMIF check out their web site at www.smifoundation.org.

Hybrid Community Foundation and Regional Development Organization

Across the United States, place-based foundations, including community foundations, are increasingly engaged in finding solutions versus treating the symptoms challenging our communities. Within this movement, community foundations are becoming proactively engaged in community economic development employing a wider range of powers and tools including research, convening partners, aligning donors with important community work, strategic grant making and now impact investing.

SMIF and the other Initiative Foundations were innovative pioneers from their very beginnings about a quarter of a century ago marrying the best of community foundations with economic development

¹ The text in this section is from SMIF’s website.

organizations. From their start, Initiative Foundations have been engaged in economic development including business development. This is a powerful model that has been transformative in the State of Minnesota worthy of study by others across North America.

Southwest Initiative Foundation e2 Work

Before there was REV, the national Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (now e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems) partnered with the Southwest Initiative Foundation on an e2 Institute. The Foundation gathered community economic development leaders and practitioners from throughout southwestern Minnesota to be part of an intensive e2 Institute to explore both entrepreneurial development opportunities and the e2 Development Framework.

While e2 has learned from and worked with a number of Initiative Foundations, SMIF is the first Initiative Foundation to fully employ e2's Development Framework with rural communities.

The Minnesota Initiative Foundation regions are so vast, and also so very different, that over the years, McKnight has continued to see a deep value in the partnership. The Minnesota Initiative Foundations can do things that we can't easily do."

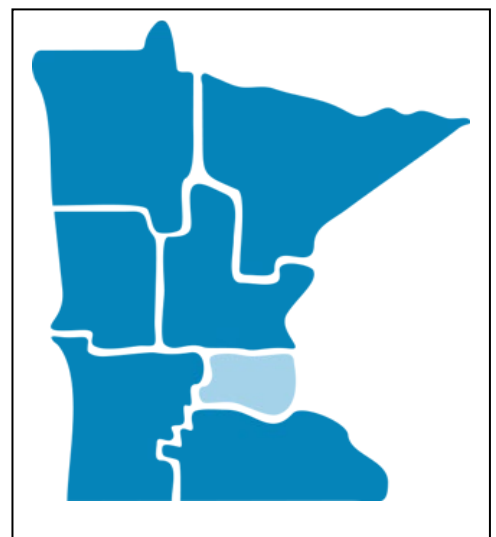
Kara Carlisle, Vice President of Programs
McKnight Foundation

Minnesota's Initiative Foundations

In the early 1980s, declines in cornerstone industries like farming and mining were stripping rural communities of people, jobs, and hope. Believing that the people of rural Minnesota were best positioned to make decisions for themselves, the McKnight Foundation joined forces with Greater Minnesota leaders to take action. McKnight envisioned a regional strategy that would encourage local giving and local responsibility for the long-term welfare of each region. The experiment worked. Today, the Minnesota Initiative Foundations are strong, independent entities that are built to respond to regional needs and opportunities. Each foundation is independent and serves its region with unique grants, business loans, leadership programs and donor services.

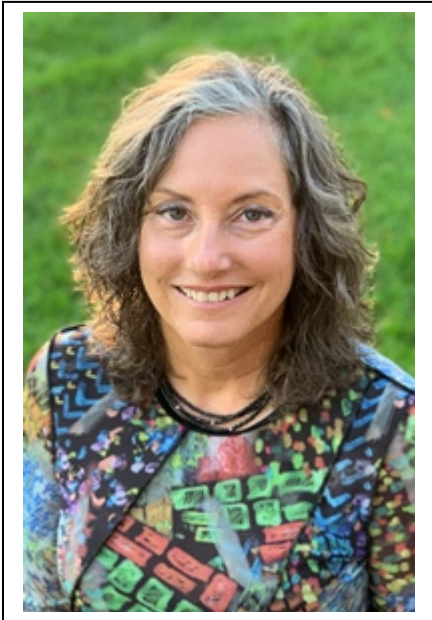
To date, the foundations also receive support from governments, other foundations, businesses, and individuals who wish to invest in the future of their communities. In the years since, McKnight has invested a total of \$285 million, which has fueled dispersal of \$430 million in grants and loans since inception in economic impact across Greater Minnesota. To learn more about Minnesota's Initiative Foundations check out the following web site www.greatermnnesota.net.

Minnesota's Initiative Foundations were birthed by the McKnight Foundation. Minnesota is rich in private and public foundations. Their funding and investments have materially contributed to the vitality of



this remarkable state. We would argue that Minnesota is among America’s five highest performing states based on socio-economic indicators. To learn more about the McKnight Foundation check out their web site at www.mcknight.org.

Our next stop in our REV journey is the origins and development of REV beginning in the mid-2010s.



“We cherish our smallest of towns and REV has elevated the possibilities of economic growth. Our assets of our people and resources, when used to their fullest of abilities, give our region strong, sustainable systems to foster endless economic prosperity.”

Pam Bishop, Vice President of Economic Development
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

REV and Its Development Journey

In 2021 SMIF is celebrating its 35th anniversary (founded in 1986). SMIF has been engaged in proactive community economic development as well as providing community foundation services since its creation. The following chronology provides an overview of SMIF’s and REV’s development journey:

Figure 2 – REV’s Development Journey

1986	The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation is founded.
2006	Pam Bishop is hired to lead economic and business development programming.
2008	Pam and Don meet with a shared interest in entrepreneur-led development.
2015	Pam begins to seriously explore an entrepreneurial communities initiative at SMIF.
2016	SMIF’s Leadership Team and Board Authorizes the REV Initiative
2016	SMIF Retains the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (now e2)
Late 2016	REV Design Work Begins
April 2017	REV issues is Request for Information to Potential Partner Communities
	First Community Cohort Selected
November 2017	Community Kick-Off Gathering Training Around the e2 Development Framework in Owatonna

	Blandin Foundation Becomes a Funding Partner
	Community Coaching Team Training
2018	Year 1 – Cohort 1 Work
	Quarterly Peer Learning Events Start
2019	Year 2 – Cohort 1 Work
2020	Year 3 – Cohort 1 Work
	Cohort 1 Graduation
	Decision to Host a Second REV Community Cohort
	Second Community Cohort Named
2021	Cohort 2 is Launched

COVID Recession Impacts on the REV Work

We asked Pam Bishop with REV how the COVID Health Pandemic and associated recession has impacted REV in 2020 and 2021. Here is her response...

“(1) Communication and connection with entrepreneurs was far more challenging; however, more individuals became familiar and comfortable with virtual platforms.

(2) Redirecting resources to support e-commerce platforms and educate business owners to effectively use social media as their voice and sales tool.

(3) Keeping storefronts open by assisting with the application of and receipt of state and federal grants and loans.

(4) All meetings held virtually made it difficult to spend enough time communicating within the REV teams.”

The Pandemic Recession has impacted different parts of the American economy to various degrees when compared to the Great Recession where impacts were more universal throughout the economy and society. Small businesses associated with hospitality, retail and non-essential services are particularly hard hit.

Future Vision for REV

In our conversation with Pam Bishop, we also asked her to share SMIF’s vision for REV. Here is her response...

(1) “We will continue to focus REV on small towns which are community ready and desire to adopt your own approach to economic development.

(2) We will make available to more communities every three years the opportunity to apply and participate.

(3) We will expand our REV coaching support so more communities have the opportunity to participate.

(4) We will seek funding partners to enable SMIF and its partners to appropriately allocate important resources to groom new communities and support REV graduates.”

REV's First Cohort of Community Partners

There were six communities in REV's first cohort including:

- Blue Earth in Faribault County
- Lake City in Wabasha County
- Le Sueur in Sibley and Le Sueur Counties
- Spring Grove in Houston County
- Spring Valley in Fillmore County
- Lanesboro in Fillmore County

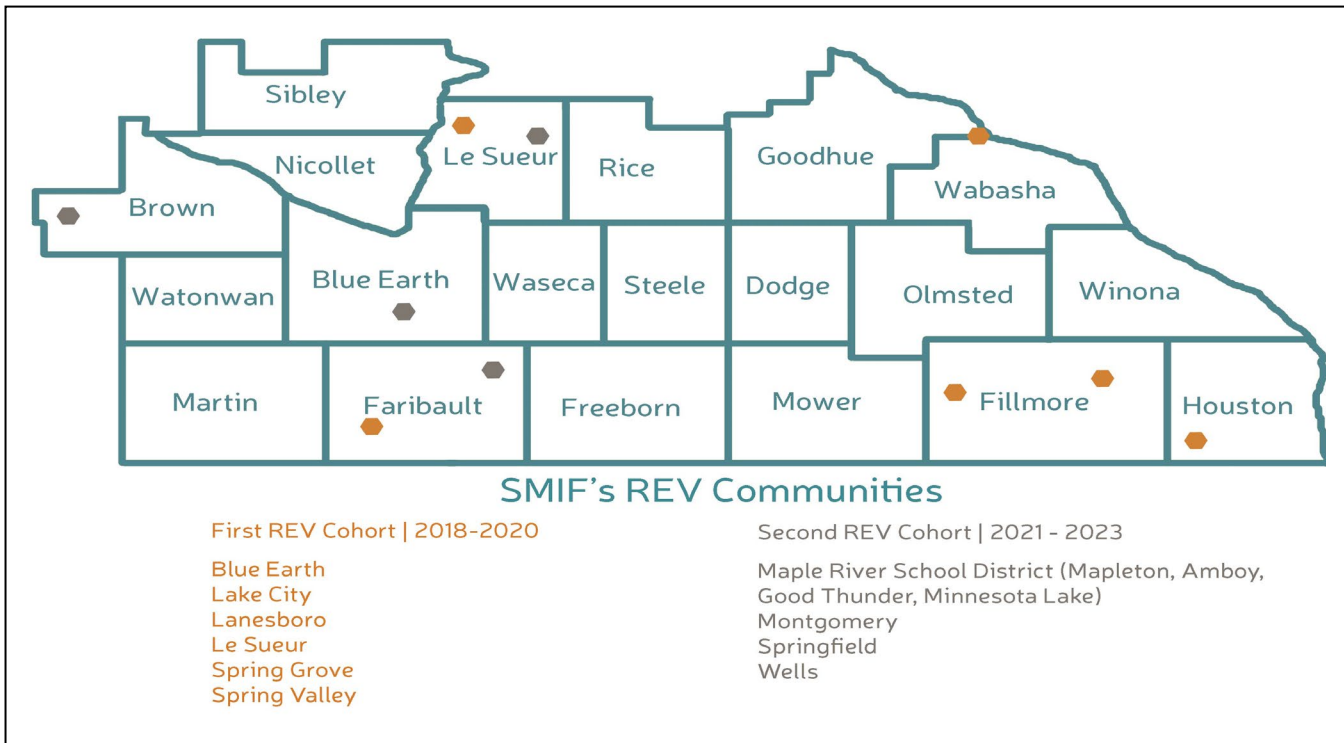
To learn more about these communities, check out their most recent [Development Opportunity Profiles](#).

The following are the newly constituted second cohort of REV communities:

- Wells in Faribault County
- Springfield in Brown County
- Montgomery in Le Sueur County
- Mapleton, Amboy, Good Thunder in Blue Earth County and Minnesota Lake in Blue Earth and Faribault County (e.g., this is a collaborative community REV effort)



Figure 3 – Map with Location of Cohort 1 and 2 Communities



Within our e2 Development Framework, we strongly recommend the use of community cohorts. Cohorts, like investment portfolios, will have communities that excel and others that progress more slowly. What is important is the performance of the overall cohort portfolio and the generation of in-region success stories. These success stories can inspire and motivate other communities to do the heavy work of growing an entrepreneurial community to create stronger partners for REV assistance. Multiple community cohorts over time can ensure a scaling that can inspire an entire region to embrace entrepreneurship as foundational development.

Next in our journey exploring REV let's consider e2's Top 10 lessons learned.

Top 10 Lessons Learned

We have learned so much from our collaboration with REV. We have curated our top 10 lessons learned from REV and its first cohort of communities that have value for others seeking to grow entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural America including:

1. Deep and Long-Term Commitment
2. The Role of a Host Organization
3. Community Readiness and Community Commitments
4. Trainings, Peer Learnings and Gatherings
5. Engaged and Strong Community Leadership
6. Effective Community Coaching
7. Mini-Grants and Resource Networking

8. Use of Opportunity Analytics
9. SourceLink's Client Navigator
10. Use of a Development Framework

Now let's explore each of these top 10 lessons learned.

Deep and Long-Term Commitment. The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation is a mature and sophisticated community foundation and economic development organization. As a mature and strategic organization, the Foundation takes time to consider where to focus its development efforts. The REV initiative had been in the works for years before the Foundation's leadership team and board made the commitment to move forward. Once authorization and funding were provided by the Foundation, the REV team, led by Pam Bishop, took time to design REV.

The Foundation and its partners have made a deep and longer-term commitment to REV with the understanding that this kind of entrepreneurial ecosystem building takes time to realize impacts and desired transformative change. For example, the Foundation made a three-year resource commitment to its first cohort of community partners. Additionally, the Foundation made a contingent commitment to sponsor a second cohort of communities once value was demonstrated with the first community cohort -- which it has since made this commitment.

Blandin Foundation Partnership

The Blandin Foundation located in Grand Rapids, Minnesota was created Charles K. Blandin in 1941 for the purpose "...to aid and promote Grand Rapids and the surrounding area." SMIF has collaborated with the Blandin Foundation before and recognized its interest in rural communities and entrepreneur-led development. Over the years at e2 we have done a number of consultations with the Blandin Foundation on entrepreneurship. SMIF sought out the Blandin Foundation to (1) secure additional funding for the REV initiative and (2) create an opportunity for this approach to economic development to be spread across rural Minnesota. For more information about the Blandin Foundation check out their website at www.blandinfoundation.org.

The Role of a Host Organization. SMIF is serving as the host organization for REV. Having a capable and committed host organization is key to entrepreneurial ecosystem building. In this case there is a regional organization – the Foundation – playing this role with partner communities throughout its service areas. Being the host organization, the Foundation is providing comprehensive support to REV communities as is the case with other regional ecosystem building efforts such as NetWork Kansas, Rural Action in Appalachia Ohio, and other similar initiatives across America. This strategy approach is part of a **top down** and **bottom-up** optimal approach.

Community Readiness and Community Commitments. The Foundation spent nearly a year designing REV and a key design consideration was community readiness and selection. e2 shared its best practice learning but the Foundation ultimately tapped into its own extensive work experience with rural communities in southern Minnesota. Community readiness is foundational and contributes to success with emergent entrepreneurial ecosystem building initiatives. The Foundation also embraces the 4-H value of **doing with**. The readiness process not only helped the Foundation select its first and second community cohorts, but helped these communities build their readiness for this work.

REV's Rural Communities Target - 5,000 in Population or Less Across Its Region

In its early design work with SMIF's leadership team and its board, REV targeted five to seven rural communities as part of its [first cohort](#). These communities were to have 5,000 or less residents and the selection process was based on serious interest, community readiness and community partners located throughout the SMIF service area.

Trainings, Peer Learnings and Gatherings. The Foundation contributed to a robust program of formal trainings, peer learning events and gatherings. REV invested in creating a **learning community**, a powerful development strategy. Too often, limited funding restricts hosting these kinds of activities thus undermining initiative progress and ultimate success. No better teacher within the REV (e.g., a version of the e2 Development Framework) model are coaches and communities encouraging and supporting each other in this development journey.



A typical community building (theater) in Le Sueur.

Engaged and Strong Community Leadership. Early REV development discussions focused on the all-important topic of engaged and strong community leadership. At e2 we call this leadership **community champions**. Community champions are a form of leadership that is deeply vested, highly effective, well respected, and able to engage their community in important development work like entrepreneur-led development. Community leadership was a key readiness consideration and a focus of community coaching support.

Community Coaching Effectiveness and Turnover Challenges

Use of community coaches is foundational within e2's development framework. REV embraced this design element procuring, investing in, and supporting its coaching team. By and large this community coaching team has remained stable throughout the first community cohort years. This is critically important where coach turnover can undermine progress and create frustration among community partners. Pam and REV were very diligent in community coach selection, training, and support. The coaching team gathers regularly to provide peer support. In the early years of the first cohort of communities e2 provided formal training, mentoring and one-on-one coaching support.

Effective Community Coaching. The Foundation committed to robust and impactful community coaching as the leading edge of community engagement with its REV community partners. There are a number of key considerations. First, Pam Bishop, the Foundation’s economic development program leader, elected to be a community coach. This decision was very valuable in curating a REV community coaching team. Pam was living and experiencing what the other community coaches were experiencing. She was engaged in every meeting and gathering. She also became a mentor other community coaches as a veteran community developer. Second, the Foundation elected to form partnerships with Minnesota Extension and Region 9 (as well as with Foundation coaches) to form the REV coaching team.

Community Coaching Team

The current community coaching team includes Jennifer Hawkins with the University of Minnesota Extension, Neil Linscheid with University of Minnesota Center for Community Vitality SMIF and Linda Wallace with Region 9 Development Commission. Pam Bishop serves as both a lead community coach and community coaching mentor to the other members of the coaching team. By design REV wanted to engage other development partners in this work resulting in partnership with Minnesota Extension and the Region 9 Development Corporation. Pam Bishop with SMIF was part of the first coaching team and continues to lead REV.

Mini-Grants and Resource Networking. Even though many rural communities have higher development capacity when compared to other rural communities in other parts of America, the Foundation understands that having resources it can deploy to help its partner communities ranging from mini grants for community staffing and initiatives to networking to other resources was very important within the REV design. As a development organization itself, the Foundation has other entrepreneurship resources and knew how to help its partner communities to network to non-Foundation resources. These design components not only contribute to progress, but are accelerators providing community motivation and realization of progress. See Figure 4 on the next page for details.

Building Regional and Local Capacity

At e2 we approach our work with the intent of building the capacity of regions and communities to undertake work associated with the e2 Development Framework. Initially e2 provided community analytics and now, REV’s partner, the University of Minnesota Extension Service, is providing community analytics using existing database services to mirror similar data produced through the E2’s development opportunity profile.

Another example of community capacity building has been involvement of the AmeriCorps Program. In Lake City they engaged an AmeriCorps volunteer to grow relationships with this community’s Hispanic entrepreneurial community. Blue Earth, another first cohort community, is now employing an AmeriCorps volunteer in its entrepreneurial initiative.

Figure 4 – Examples of Mini-Grants During the First Cohort of Communities

Lake City – Making it Home – Marketing Small Town America. To create a marketing campaign to increase brand identity, this initiative was in partnership with the University of Minnesota Extension for Community Vitality. This was a three-year initiative with expected measurable outcomes by 2025.

Spring Grove School Community Makerspace Program. Funds supported the creation of a new Community Makerspace Program to empower and direct students to address community challenges through their own individualized, creative projects. The initiative kick started a new plan to focus on individualized education and create an entrepreneurial-minded cohort of students to contribute to the economic growth of Spring Grove. Following project completion, 15 adults and 16 students from 10th-12th grade were involved in this project.

Spring Valley Incubation and Acceleration for Indoor and Outdoor Spaces. Based on an incubator survey and the REV survey, the U.S. Economic Development Association (EDA) proposed to use a repurposed parcel of land and several vacant buildings for a newly created incubation and acceleration program. Twelve entrepreneurs engaged and participated in various aspects of the program, with the EDA offering additional resources to local businesses. As a result, the Spring Valley EDA created a new website to make resources available to businesses. Co-working spaces were developed in partnership with the Small Business Development Center and Rochester Community and Technical College, Rochester. About 15 businesses in Spring Valley too advantage of the program. A total of seven organizations partnered to support this initiative

Imagine Spring Grove Entrepreneur Toolkit. This project developed a localized entrepreneur toolkit and accompanying programming to equip entrepreneurs with the resources and information they need to address common business challenges, such as start-up procedures, financial management, succession planning and more. At least 16 businesses were impacted by these workshops. Three organizations collaborated on this project. New connections were made through “business breakfasts” and several workshops were held on financial management and leadership. The toolkit is available on the Spring Grove EDA website. Books were created as a spiral bound edition so that they can be updated whenever needed. The toolkit was a great way to meet with entrepreneurs and start conversations. The EDA staff worked with the school to do a tour with high school seniors where they were able to do visits with businesses of their choice and look at local jobs in the trade industries. Many students were unaware of the opportunities.

SHOP (Support, Host, Offer, Participate) Blue Earth. SHOP is a community initiative of the Blue Earth EDA and BEA REV’d Up which works to provide high school students with resources to learn more about career options by connecting them with area professionals. This program hopes to encourage students to consider Blue Earth as a place to own businesses, excel in their careers, buy homes, and build futures by helping them establish relationships with local professionals and experts who can support and encourage them.

Business Enrichment Learning Series – Lanesboro. The Lanesboro EDA would like to host 4 workshops on topics to be identified through surveys in an effort to provide educational support for local business owners. The workshops will be facilitated by the University of Winona Extension.

Business Enrichment Learning Series – Lanesboro. The Lanesboro EDA would like to host 4 workshops on topics to be identified through surveys in an effort to provide educational support for local business owners. The workshops will be facilitated by the University of Winona Extension. Lanesboro Stay Safe Resource Grant Program.

Use of Opportunity Analytics. Part of e2's role was to provide entrepreneurship opportunity analytics. We produced development opportunity profiles for year's one and two for the first cohort of communities. These profiles were used by partner REV communities and their community coaches to explore potential entrepreneurial development opportunities. Employment of this kind of analytics can be a powerful tool helping communities stretch their understanding of what is possible with entrepreneur-led development.

NetWork Kansas and Opportunity Analytics

e2 (formerly the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship) has been a partner in Kansas' pursuit of entrepreneur-led development even before there was a NetWork Kansas. Our first work centered on capturing the State's Ernesto Sirolli initiative with Erik Pages (www.entreworks.com). Then we worked with Kansas Farm Bureau and others adapting HomeTown Competitiveness with rural communities in Kansas. Finally, we advised the formation of NetWork Kansas and became a co-learner with NetWork Kansas. Throughout this decades-long engagement, we employed **opportunity analytics** to help communities explore their larger development opportunities.

SourceLink's Client Navigator. As a development organization, the Foundation understands the concept of a client portfolio. The Foundation is both a technical assistance and gap financing provider to businesses in southern Minnesota. As part of REV the Foundation offered to cost share a **CRM** or **Customer Relations Management** system developed by SourceLink. Many of the first cohort communities cost-shared on the SourceLink resource. Others chose to use the less robust e2 free CRM resource. Embracing entrepreneur-led development with a portfolio mindset is important and REV understands this consideration. Individual entrepreneurial deals might succeed or fail. What is important, as is the case with retirement investment portfolios, is how the portfolio is performing.

Use of REM or Ripple Effect Mapping

An important REV innovation was the use of REM or Ripple Effect Mapping through a partnership with Minnesota Extension (www.extension.edu). REM is a powerful tool that can be used in communities to capture both intentional and organic outcomes within a development initiative. REM was employed annually with partner communities to capture their progress, celebrate their success, and motivate communities to continue this work. To learn more about Ripple Effect Mapping check out this [free book](#).

Use of a Development Framework. Once again, the REV initiative substantiates the value of having an entrepreneurial development framework. A development framework provides strong guidance on "what is important to do and when to do it," but also provides for community preferences, customization, and initiative adjustments. Starting from scratch without a field-tested development framework can yield success but having a framework that makes sense to both the host organization, its coaches and partner communities can save significant time, energy, and opportunities for failure.

REV Podcasts – Critical Story Capture

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation invested funds to partner with a communication entity to produce 7 podcasts. The first podcast was an overview of the program, followed by 30-minute interviews with each of the six REV communities.

As we wrap up this paper focusing on Minnesota’s REV initiative, let’s explore other REV resources available to our readers.

Innovations Adopted Between the First and Second Community Cohorts

We asked Pam Bishop, Vice President of Economic Development lead creator of REV, what are the innovations that have been made between the first and second community cohorts. The following is Pam’s response:

1. *“Simplified metrics spreadsheet which automatically aggregates information and is a bit more user friendly.*
2. *SMIF’s Prosperity Initiative tools will be embedded to support minority owned business growth.*
3. *An Entrepreneurial Confidence Index will be administered designed to measure the current state of entrepreneurial culture and attitudes. We will be doing this survey annually to assess changes that may be attributable to REV related activities*
4. *Introducing a simplified REV tracking tool to collect ongoing survey data and note entrepreneur – specific information. This will be for communities who may opt not to participate in the Source Link Navigator CRM system.*
5. *Added a new coach to the team to support the capacity of needs of the growing program.”*

Additional Resources

SMIF and REV have curated a number of stories and videos about REV. The following hyperlinks will connect you to these additional resources.

- For stories, videos, and podcasts about REV, <https://smifoundation.org/rev/>
- For access to the REV impact report, <https://smifoundation.org/blog/2020/09/economic-resiliency-in-a-small-town/>
- Additional information about REV can be accessed through its REV Newsletters. Additionally, REV is an on-going initiative, and these newsletters can ensure continuing access to the evolving REV story, <https://smifoundation.org/stay-current/newsletters/>
- e2 is also producing, as part of its [Pathways to Rural Prosperity Podcast](#), an episode with Pam Bishop focusing on REV.

Every day in America, each and every community has the primary responsibility for its own development and future vitality. This is a **24-7-365 forever** responsibility and commitment. For rural America experiencing profound changes in underlying industries like commodity agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism, growing a more diverse economy is paramount. REV is an illustration of a

promising entrepreneurial ecosystem building model in Southern Minnesota focusing on rural communities of 5,000 residents or less.

Conclusion

As we at e2 have worked throughout North America for over four decades we have come to appreciate just how innovative and progressive Minnesota has been and is. Its economy is high value with world-class businesses, arts and culture and can-do rural communities. Minnesota's Initiative Foundations, including the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation is a case in point. SMIF's REV initiative is pioneering new ground and represents a very promising rural community focused entrepreneurial ecosystem building initiative in North America today.

Congrats REV for your remarkable progress!

Questions and Additional Information

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