

2022 | Annual Review

# IMPACT — THAT — MULTIPLIES



# It starts with **YOU!**

Dear Reader,

As you leaf through this 2022 Annual Review, you'll see the sprawling landscape of our work here in west central Minnesota. **As a community foundation and an economic development organization, we promote philanthropy in our region and we help communities plan for the future.** This combination of responsibilities could not be more beneficial because it gives us two sets of tools to work with in addressing the challenges we face.

Some might read through this report and be impressed with the breadth of our work but not immediately see the connections between what we've chosen to highlight. What does transportation planning or gap financing have to do with early childhood education, for example? **For us, it all rolls up into three overarching ideas: climate, community, and kids.**

We're still inspired by what President John F. Kennedy encouraged the nation to do nearly sixty years ago: continually ask what we can do. And we're also inspired by the McKnight Foundation's decision to create six initiative foundations, ours included, in 1986. Their insight was that solutions developed at the grassroots level by the people most affected by those decisions were far superior to anything that could be delivered from afar. **To this very day, and into the foreseeable future, we're committed to local action that improves the lives of people in our region, all 237,000 of them.**

Several years ago, we adopted the Sustainable Development Goals into our strategic framework. These 17 goals are ambitious, interdependent targets for protecting and preserving a world where everyone can thrive and everyone belongs. **Climate change is an existential challenge that underscores how the work of building a strong community is truly local and, at the same time, completely global.** The air, the water, and the entire biosphere that supports us here on earth are all shared resources and require cooperative stewardship. As another Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, wrote, "nature is the infrastructure of our communities." Striving for a harmonious balance with nature is something we can all do locally, and doing so produces benefits that can be felt all around the world.

Most people have heard the phrase "children are our future," and they are. But they're also our achievements. They're the result of everything we could think of doing for them, all the effort we invested in them, and all the love we could bestow upon them. They reflect on us.

When we ask ourselves what we can do here in west central Minnesota, we see a Gordian knot that ties together being our best selves, as citizens and leaders, with building vibrant communities and addressing climate change, all while investing in our children. **Our goal is a world where everyone belongs and everyone can thrive, children and adults alike.** This is the kind of multi-dimensional puzzle that takes a bold vision to solve, which is why we adopted the theme of climate, community, and kids to guide our work. We hope those ideas inspire you as well, and we invite you to join us in rising to the challenge.



**Anna Wasescha | President**



West Central Initiative unites resources and ideas for

# PEOPLE, PLANET, AND PROSPERITY

With the Sustainable Development Goals as our north star, we're a visionary, convener, and catalyst for stronger communities and a more vibrant region. By harnessing the power of collective action—nonprofits, businesses, community groups, government, and individuals—we empower big dreams and bold actions to help bring prosperity to our people, communities, region, and planet.



# STRENGTHENING OUR REGION





## LIVE WIDE OPEN: Bringing our neighbors together and building welcoming and inclusive places

In early September, more than a dozen groups across west central Minnesota hosted events to welcome and celebrate newcomers of all backgrounds.

These efforts were part of Welcoming Week, a national movement organized by Welcoming America. Welcoming America's mission is "to support communities building a welcoming society where every person, including immigrants, can fully contribute and shape our shared prosperity."

West Central Initiative offered sponsorships of up to \$500 to local hosts organizing events. "Our intent was to let communities take the lead and really make this their own," said Community Engagement Specialist and Live Wide Open Coordinator Rick Schara. "We received many, many creative ideas to sponsor."

Some events focused on bringing community members together for celebratory activities, and others held space to examine issues faced by immigrants and refugees.

"I was excited to see the connections and efforts prompted through Welcoming Week that will continue throughout the year," added Rick.

Several communities in our region are undergoing broader efforts to address inclusivity and equity, and the momentum of these initiatives translated into the energy surrounding Welcoming Week in the region.

**Our Live Wide Open regional recruitment campaign showcases what west central Minnesota has to offer, including opportunities for rewarding careers and the natural amenities that draw so many to this region. Visit [livewideopen.com](http://livewideopen.com) to learn more.**





# A CLIMATE-SMART REGIONAL ROADMAP:

## Developing west central Minnesota's first Climate Action Plan

We envision a future where our planet is respected, sustained, and recognized as paramount to our existence.

With that in mind, in early 2022 we began working with paleBLUEdot, headquartered in Maplewood, Minnesota, to develop a Climate Action Plan for west central Minnesota.

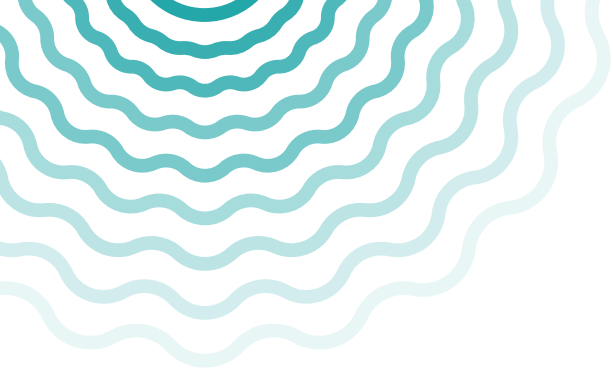
The first phase of the project began in early June with distribution of a survey to help us identify the climate-related issues most important to those living in our region. We then conducted a greenhouse gas emission study using area-specific data on energy use and carbon emissions. We also evaluated infrastructure, natural resources, transportation, demographics, and renewable energy opportunities to develop a vulnerability assessment.

"Our goal is to produce and implement a regionally relevant plan to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change," said Community Planner Mark Kaelke.

During the second planning phase, stretching from late 2022 and into 2023, our Climate Action Planning Team will review the vulnerability assessment to develop recommendations and the Climate Action Plan. Once a draft of the plan is ready, we'll host a series of meetings for public engagement and feedback that we'll use to finalize the plan.

The final Climate Action Plan will be a regional roadmap to address climate issues now and for future generations.





## RURAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT launches to increase civic participation

In Minnesota, on average 1 in 21 individuals need to serve in positional leadership (local government or nonprofit) in their lifetime. In west central Minnesota, demand is higher, reaching 1 in 9 individuals in Wilkin and Stevens Counties, 1 in 8 in Traverse County, and 1 in 7 in Grant County—classifying nearly half of our region as “leadership distressed.”

West Central Initiative aims to strengthen rural democracy by helping residents meet these demands through the Rural Democracy Project. “Our goal is to increase civic participation and awareness,” said Rural Initiatives Strategist Celeste Koppe. “We plan to offer training to individuals who are considering running for office, to engage historically excluded groups in civic processes, and to support mayors by creating a network at the local level.”

Ben Schierer, Mayor of Fergus Falls, will help to lead the Rural Democracy Project work as a Presidential Leadership Scholar (PLS). Schierer is one of 60 Scholars and the only person from Minnesota who will form the eighth annual PLS class.



Mayors are at the heart of local democracy. Through the Lead Local Mayors Network, we’re convening and building relationships among the 82 mayors in west central Minnesota, so they can share ideas and encourage their constituents to get involved in public service.



Interested in running for office or working on a local campaign? Learn the basics through Run4Rural trainings. Participate in an intensive weekend in the fall of 2023 or take a deeper dive into strengthening democratic culture in our six-month program starting in early 2024.

Contact [celeste@wcf.org](mailto:celeste@wcf.org) for more information.



# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

## WHAT ONCE WAS OLD IS NEW AGAIN: Bringing Hatchery Row back to Battle Lake

Driving down Henning Street in Battle Lake, it's almost impossible not to notice the construction going on just one block from Lake Avenue. What was once a row of dilapidated buildings near the bustling main drag is about to come to life again as a new development called Hatchery Row.

The name of the project pays homage to the hatchery that was a staple of the community for generations. Hatchery Row will feature 15 to 20 apartments and 12,000 to 15,000 square feet of commercial space. The town of Battle Lake is growing and changing and the need for more retail space and housing in Battle Lake has become evident.

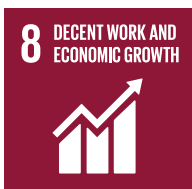
"The Hatchery Row project received several grants from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Otter Tail County Community Development Agency, and USDA Rural Development," said our Director of Business and Economic Development Greg Wagner. "However, more financing was needed to get construction started. That's where we came in."

West Central Initiative provided a \$300,000 gap financing loan through our Business and Industry Loan Fund. This gap financing allowed the project to keep its momentum and break ground in August 2022.

We seek to finance projects in our region that create new or better-paying jobs, have a true financing gap, redevelop vacant or underutilized property, or retain businesses. "The revitalization of the old hatchery site, the potential for new job openings, and the opportunity for entrepreneurship made the Hatchery Row project the perfect fit for us," added Greg.

### Our Loan Program

Start-ups and businesses looking to expand can tap into West Central Initiative's loan program when they have difficulty accessing bank financing. As a "gap lender," we can supplement or complement conventional or bank financing to help the financing package succeed.



Hatchery Row will feature 15 to 20 apartments and 12,000 to 15,000 square feet of commercial space.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EXPERTISE

Through our planning work, we partner with regional and local leaders to create vibrant, sustainable, and welcoming communities for all.

As the federally designated planning organization for the region through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), we create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Region IV Economic Development District of Minnesota every five years. The current plan (2022-2026) primarily focuses on growing the regional population and workforce, increasing wages, improving child care capacity and availability, increasing housing affordability and availability, increasing access to broadband, and examining the sustainability of infrastructure.

### Our Planning Services

- Comprehensive development planning, climate resiliency planning, pandemic response and recovery planning
- Resource and grant navigation and writing for community and economic development projects
- Small business development support
- Sustainable food and agricultural development and planning
- Housing plan development
- Community engagement design and facilitation



Contact Greg Wagner, AICP, Director of Business & Economic Development, at [800-735-2239](tel:800-735-2239) or [greg@wcf.org](mailto:greg@wcf.org) to learn more.



# PIONEERKIDS

When a lack of access to child care made hiring and retaining staff difficult, PioneerCare came up with a unique solution: provide on-site child care for PioneerCare staff. And after years of collaboration with our Early Childhood Specialist Marsha Erickson, PioneerKids was born.

"I first met Steve Guttormson, PioneerCare Marketing and Foundation Director, during a community-based leadership program in 2017," said Marsha. Her working group was outlining a plan to expand child care, and Steve asked to join. "Steve didn't have experience with child care but saw many parallels between long-term care for the elderly at PioneerCare and the child care industry—care for a vulnerable population, higher liability, lower wages, and high employee turnover."

Through the years, Marsha and Steve continued to discuss issues surrounding access to child care. Steve, along with the other PioneerCare administrators, knew that child care was vital to PioneerCare's long-term viability but struggled to find the right solution.

In late 2021, Marsha received a call from Steve with a new idea. "PioneerCare had been affected by the pandemic," said Steve. "Hiring and retaining staff had become a

difficult and frustrating task." To alleviate staffing woes, Steve and PioneerCare's Human Resources Director, Patti Fandrich, wanted to start providing on-site child care for staff. A small group of PioneerCare staff and community stakeholders sketched ideas to use a recently vacated space for child care. Marsha referred Steve and Patti to First Children's Finance to run numbers and create a business plan.

After years of conversations, deterred plans, and shelved ideas, PioneerKids was born. It's Rule-2 specialty licensed child care in a non-residential space—in other words, family-based child care, but not located in a home.

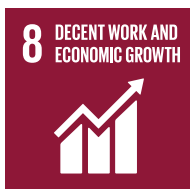
West Central Initiative provided a \$27,700 Child Care Education Capacity Grant for the staff to equip the facility with children's furniture and section the yard for the safety of the children and the care clients. Fundraising will continue to finance operations.

"In the world of instant gratification, access to child care can be a long, frustrating process," said Marsha. "There are no quick fixes. It may take years to cross the finish line, but in the end, with determination and commitment, the right solution can be found."

## Spotlight: Early Childhood Initiative

Our Early Childhood Initiative is a network of parents, educators, businesses, community leaders, faith leaders, and policymakers joined in a long-term effort to give young children the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving, and succeeding. We partner with communities to assess early childhood efforts, identify areas for improvement, and help make them a reality. This initiative includes the Early Childhood Dental Network and Early Childhood Mental Health Network.

Contact us to learn how you can help.



# Community input sparks solutions for **Safe Routes to School Plan**

Safe Routes to School is a national movement that encourages kids to walk and bike to school, hoping to foster a lifelong love of being physically active. Minnesota considers this movement so important that the state created programming to help fund plans, infrastructure, and school curriculum to encourage walking and biking.

Our Transportation Planning Team provides technical assistance to help communities create plans.

In 2022, our Director of Transportation Planning Wayne Hurley and Transportation Planner Mallory Jarvi (pictured) began working with the Pelican Rapids School District to create a Safe Routes to School Plan.

"The comprehensive planning process requires an entire school year to complete," said Mallory. "Most of the data collection involves asking parents, teachers, and other community members for ideas to improve walking and biking in their town. The data we collect and the recommendations we make guide the school district for years to come."

Early in the school year, Wayne and Mallory attended the Pelican Rapids Schools' parent-teacher conferences to ask students and parents about the challenges kids encounter when walking or biking to school. "Giving kids a platform to discuss problems and discover solutions is an integral part of the Safe Routes to School planning process," said Mallory. "It's amazing what you can learn when you ask kids for their perspectives and give them space to tell their stories."

We expect to finalize the Pelican Rapids Safe Routes to School Plan in the spring of 2023.



## Helping all to drive, bike, walk, and roll around our region safely and efficiently

Through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, West Central Initiative administers a transportation planning program for west central Minnesota. This partnership allows for coordinated, long-range, regional transportation planning.

As part of the regional transportation planning process, we oversee studies related to transportation, provide technical assistance to communities on transportation and active transportation issues, and work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation District 4 Area Transportation Partnership.



# GROWING GRANT COUNTY

Fighting local hunger through education, food production and processing, and philanthropy



West Central Initiative received a \$374,000 Community Food Project Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to launch Growing Grant County. Through a partnership between the West Central Area and Ashby School Districts, local food shelves, and very supportive agriculturally based communities, Growing Grant County will build a system of collaboration to:

- **Grow more local food.**
- **Provide training to students in the art of meat butchering and processing.**
- **Support Grant County food shelves by increasing donations of fresh foods.**
- **Create a more sustainable and resilient food system.**

"We outlined a five-step process, which will culminate into a fully developed local food system in Grant County," said our Business Development Officer Kate Mudge (pictured top left). "The first step in that process was fundraising for the new greenhouse at West Central Area High School, which led to increases in both student interest in agricultural careers beyond the 'family farm' and community buy-in around improving the local food system."

The next two steps include strengthening the curriculum and purchasing a mobile food-processing trailer. "The trailer will allow us to enhance our curriculum and teach valuable food processing and preservation skills that our students can use throughout their entire life," said Bonita Oestreich, Ag/CTE Teacher and FFA Advisor, Ashby Public Schools. "Another exciting aspect of this

project is the reduction in food waste that will occur by becoming the bridge that connects local vegetable, fruit, and livestock producers with a market that keeps their products local and gets nutrient-dense food into the hands of those who need it most."

The fourth step in the process includes exploring food-related businesses, sales of project goods to the general public through grocers and institutions, and working with local growers to process cover crops or unprocessed crops (unpicked apples, for example).

"When the first four steps in the process are complete, we'll be looking at an entirely different local food system serving these communities," Kate adds. "This will be particularly apparent at the Grant County Food Shelf, where participants are gifted boxes of locally grown, nutrient-rich food."

Growing Grant County is one of 29 projects selected by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant program.

"We still have a long way to go, but imagine how different our community will be now that every student graduating from our schools will, at some point, have actively grown, harvested, and processed fresh food and delivered it directly to the local food shelf on a regular basis," said Eric Sawatzke (pictured top right), Agriculture Education Instructor, West Central Area Schools. "When an entire community is engaged in the fight against hunger, there's no doubt that we will succeed!"



# THRIVING COMMUNITIES: Powered by Collective Giving

As a community foundation, one of our roles is to establish and manage dedicated permanent funds that address specific charitable purposes as defined by the IRS as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. We call these funds "component funds" because they're part of our mission and asset valuation.

Component funds function in two ways: first as a fund that makes grants for charitable activities within the specific purpose of the fund and, second, to provide rural economic development loans through a revolving loan fund. Component fund activities are directed by groups of community volunteers called advisory committees. Both our team and the advisory committees play a critical role in the success of these funds.

Through these funds, residents can harness the power of collective giving to support local community improvement projects, provide funding for nonprofits, give scholarships, and build a better quality of life for years to come. These permanent funds generate interest, which can be distributed as grants or reinvested in the fund.

## Q&A with the Wheaton Dumont Community Fund

### How is your group focused on bettering your community?

We're focused on bettering our community by using West Central Initiative component funds for specific projects—then fundraising for those projects. We feel this is a great avenue for people to donate money to improve our community. When someone brings us a potential project, we consider how it could be accomplished through a component fund.

### How do you gauge your impact?

We gauge our impact by the large and small projects that have been accomplished through our partnership with West Central Initiative.

### How has your group evolved in the past five years—and where would you like to see it five years from now?

We've learned that continuous education is key. West Central Initiative has helped us with that, particularly in the area of fundraising. In the next five years, we'd like to use that knowledge to grow our donations.

We also want to help people understand all the work our team has put into helping our community grow and thrive.

### How has West Central Initiative helped your cause?

West Central Initiative's guidance on how to succeed has proven valuable. I look forward to continuing our relationship for years to come.



# Give beyond your lifetime

Planning an estate gift allows you to strategically accomplish both financial and charitable objectives. For many people, these include preserving the family name, honoring loved ones, providing for heirs, minimizing tax burdens, and supporting the community they call home. Bequests to West Central Initiative are exempt from estate taxes.

## Establishing a fund at West Central Initiative as part of your estate allows you to:

- Support your favorite nonprofits or choose community grantmaking funds that align with your interests.
- Manage gifts to multiple entities, which you can change at any time cost-free.
- Give almost any kind of asset, from real estate, to stock, to retirement plans and life insurance proceeds.
- Avoid setup costs and ongoing management of a private foundation.

## Pelican Rapids-native **Charlotte Moline** generously gives to the first community she called "home"

Charlotte Moline, currently of Bellevue, Washington, grew up in rural Pelican Rapids. When she reflects on her upbringing, several fond moments come to mind. "Growing up in the country, you experience a lot of things," said Charlotte.

"I was adventurous and daring. I'd go up into the hay loft, where there was a rope at the very top of the ceiling that we could hang onto and jump. I was the oldest of three children, and we always found creative ways like that to entertain ourselves."

Charlotte's father was a baker, so the family made trips into town around his schedule. "I enjoyed going into town with my dad. He'd drop us kids off at the drug store to look at comic books while he'd have things to do around town. Our family also visited the theater once a month, which opened my eyes to what the real world was like. It was an important part of our lives. It was where we got the news, where we enjoyed a movie. It was an experience."

It was those memories and that fondness for all things Pelican Rapids that inspired Charlotte to make several generous donations to the Pelican Rapids community, including significant gifts to the schools and the pool.

Charlotte has always been an avid reader of the Pelican Rapids Press. It was an article in the local newspaper that inspired an early gift. "When I read about the theater renovation, it took me a while—should I donate or not? That was my first gift to Pelican," she said. When Charlotte visited the theater after the renovation, she marveled at its size. "Until a more recent visit, I didn't realize how large it was. And the piano was so beautiful. It brought a tear to my eye."

Charlotte's husband, Frank, passed away in May of 2018. The couple made many trips back to Pelican Rapids over the years. "When my husband, who was from Washington, and I would visit Pelican, we both could see that the town had a lot of opportunity because of the way it was situated with the nearby parks and lakes."

Those parks are on Charlotte's list of places to visit when she makes her annual trip back to Pelican Rapids. "When I make my trips, I do it when things are happening in the parks. And now I'd love to see all of the new trails."

“

**"Growing up, giving was on my mind," said Charlotte. "I knew that if I was ever in the position to give back, I'd do it for Pelican Rapids. I'm glad I was able."**

When asked what she would say to others who are considering giving gifts to benefit the people and places most special to them in west central Minnesota, Charlotte replied, "If they feel strong enough that this is what they want to do, it's really up to the person. All our personalities are different. Everyone has interests. My interest was that if the time ever came, I'd be happy to do something for Pelican. It depends on the person."



Contact Rebecca Petersen, Director of Development,  
at [800-735-2239](tel:800-735-2239) or [rebecca@wcif.org](mailto:rebecca@wcif.org) to learn more.



# HOW WILL YOU HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?

By partnering with West Central Initiative, your charitable dollars have more impact. Our unique structure helps you gain tax advantages while giving more to the causes you care about. And with us managing the paperwork, it's a more convenient way to keep track of your giving.

## SUPPORT EMERGING COMMUNITY NEEDS

### WEST CENTRAL INITIATIVE ANNUAL OPERATING FUND OR ENDOWMENT FUND

Harness the power of collective giving to support local community improvement projects, provide funding for nonprofits, and build a better quality of life for years to come. Our endowment fund generates interest, which we distribute as grants or reinvest in the fund.

### COMMUNITY COMPONENT FUNDS

Impact your local community through contributing to one of the more than 200 community funds in our region. Local advisory committees oversee charitable needs and grants, and we handle the administration.

## MAXIMIZE GIVING TO CHARITIES AND CAUSES

### DONOR ADVISED FUNDS

A Donor Advised Fund is like a flexible charitable investment account, for the sole purpose of supporting nonprofits you care about. When you contribute cash, securities, or other assets to a Donor Advised Fund, you're generally eligible to take an immediate tax deduction. We manage those funds for tax-free growth, and you can direct grants to virtually any IRS-qualified public charity, at any time.

### FIELD OF INTEREST COMPONENT FUNDS

If there is an area of interest you care about, such as arts and culture, children and family, the environment or other issues, you can designate your fund to provide grants to support efforts that address that challenge.

### NONPROFIT OR CHARITABLE PROJECT COMPONENT FUNDS

Provide a permanent source of support for your preferred nonprofit or charitable cause, to help them achieve long-term sustainability.

## Ways to Give

We can accept many kinds of assets, helping you maximize your giving and find tax advantages.

- Cash
- Appreciated Stock
- Real Estate
- Retirement Funds
- IRA Required Distributions
- Life Insurance
- Annuities



# THANK YOU, DONORS

We're grateful to these generous donors to our endowment and operating fund over the past year. In addition to the list below, thank you to the thousands of people who have chosen to give through West Central Initiative by donating to one of our component funds.

Bill and Virginia Adams  
Alexandria Chamber of Commerce  
AmazonSmile Foundation  
American Federal Bank - Fergus Falls  
Pete and Jill Amundson  
Bell Bank - Fargo  
Bell Bank  
Allan and Jana Berube  
Robert and Gretchen Bigwood  
Mitch and Jackie Buboltz  
Edward and Pat Buerkle  
David Campbell  
Andrew and Sarah Casey  
CF Leads  
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Richard and Cynthia Drevlow  
Robert Duncan  
Eagle Bank - Glenwood  
Essentia Health  
Lowell and Nancy Einerson  
Jeff and Donna Ellsworth  
Kim and Deborah Embretson  
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Barb Fabre  
Farmers Agency, Inc.  
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Amy Freund and Katherine Mudge  
Nick and Katie Ganoe  
Gardonville Cooperative Telephone Association  
Craig Gillespie and Gwen Perman Gillespie  
Granite Partners Foundation of Minnesota, Inc.  
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Yoke-Sim Gunaratne  
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Jon and Kari Kreft  
Marjorie Lang  
Steve Lindaas  
Anthony and Susan Lussenhop  
Elena Machkasova  
Manna Foods  
Maplelag, Inc.  
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Randy and Kathy Nordick  
Linda Norland  
Keith and Connie Pederson  
Pemberton Law  
Rebecca Lynn Petersen  
Elizabeth Pihlaja  
Richard and Virginia Portmann  
Ashley Quam  
Peter and Jenna Ray  
RC Machining Company, Inc.  
Nadja Reubenova  
Rick and Helga Bauerly Foundation  
Chere Rikimoto  
Betsy Roder  
Stephen and Sandra Rufer  
Richard and Kathleen Schara  
Mary Ann Scheffler  
Joel and Laura Schmidt  
Steve and Shelley Schoeneck  
Howard and Trina Spaeth  
Donald and Diane Spitzley  
Virginia Stabnow  
Gail Supernois-Hedstrom and Kent Hedstrom  
Dianne Tuff  
Lisa Turner  
United Community Bank - Perham  
Valley Premier Bank  
Jane Vangsness Frisch  
Samantha VanWechel-Meyer  
Ben Velani

Anna Wasescha and Richard Kagan  
Heather Weber  
E. Alan Williams and Beth Pikop  
Grace Wright

City of Alexandria  
City of Ashby  
City of Barnesville  
City of Battle Lake  
City of Breckenridge  
City of Browns Valley  
City of Chokio  
City of Cyrus  
City of Dent  
City of Detroit Lakes  
City of Elbow Lake  
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City of Osakis  
City of Ottertail  
City of Parkers Prairie  
City of Pelican Rapids  
City of Perham  
City of Richville  
City of Rothsay  
City of Wheaton

Becker County  
Clay County  
Douglas County  
Grant County  
Otter Tail County  
Pope County  
Stevens County  
Traverse County  
Wilkin County

# 2022 BY THE

**1**

Lead for America Climate  
Fellow – AmeriCorps

**19**

Climate Action Planning  
Team Members

**16**

new Components Funds

**900+**

students benefited from new  
Safe Routes to School Plans  
developed in 2022 by our  
Transportation Planning Team

**\$1.7  
MILLION**

in loans distributed

**6**

new members on the  
West Central Initiative  
Board of Directors

**13**

Welcoming Week events sponsored  
in west central Minnesota

**378**

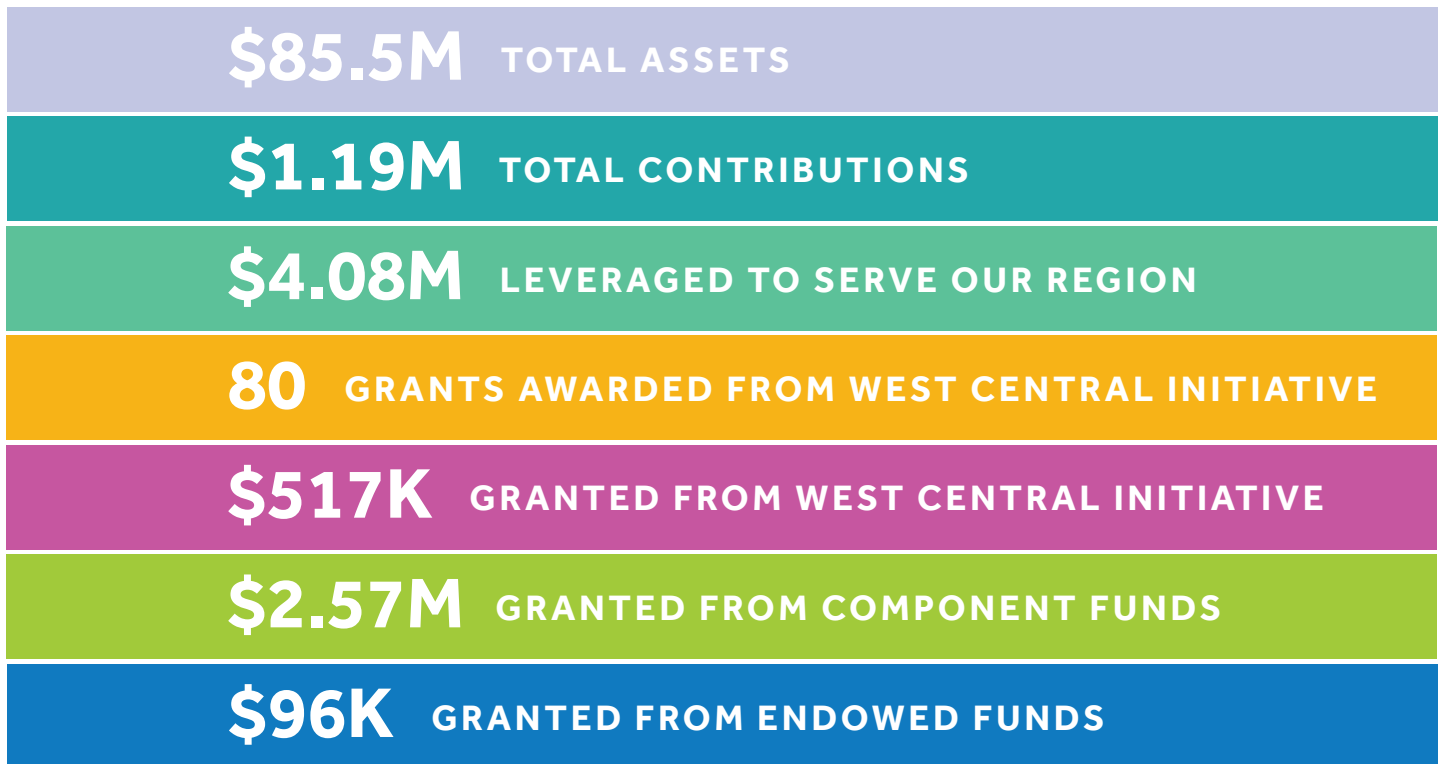
Climate Action Survey responses

**\$4.08  
MILLION**

leveraged to  
serve our region

# THE NUMBERS

## Our year at a glance



## Uniting ideas and resources through grants

Driven by our strategic priorities and connected to the Sustainable Development Goals, grants are just one of many resources we offer to support our region's families, communities, organizations, and businesses.



# GRANT RECIPIENTS

## Early Childhood

**Apple Tree Dental** | for the Early Childhood Dental Network

**Children's Corner** | for child care capacity

**Children's Dental Services** | for the Early Childhood Dental Network

**Clay County Social Services** | for the Clay County Early Childhood Initiative, child care appreciation activities, and early childhood mental health

**Detroit Lakes Community Ed** | for early childhood mental health

**Ecumen Detroit Lakes** | for child care capacity

**Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership** | for the Becker County Early Childhood Initiative

**MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc.** | for the Becker County Early Childhood Initiative and for child care appreciation activities

**Otter Cove Children's Museum** | for the Otter Tail County Early Childhood Initiative, child care appreciation activities, and the Early Childhood Dental Network

**PioneerCare** | for child care capacity

**Stevens County Human Services** | for the Stevens County Early Childhood Initiative and child care appreciation activities

**Traverse County Social Services** | for the Traverse County Early Childhood Initiative and the Early Childhood Dental Network

**Trinity Lutheran Preschool** | for child care capacity

**United Way of Douglas and Pope Counties** | for the Douglas County Early Childhood Initiative and child care appreciation activities

**United Way of Otter Tail and Wadena Counties** | for the Otter Tail County Early Childhood Initiative

**West Central Area Schools** | for the Grant County Early Childhood Initiative, child care appreciation activities, early childhood mental health, and the Early Childhood Dental Network

**Western Prairie Human Services-Pope** | for child care appreciation activities

**White Earth Child Care** | for child care appreciation activities

## Emergency Preparedness

**Carsonville Township** | for fire department support

**City of Bluffton** | for fire department support

**City of Callaway** | for fire department support

**City of Campbell** | for fire department support

**City of Dalton** | for fire department support

**City of Dent** | for fire department support

**City of Dumont** | for fire department support

**City of Elizabeth** | for fire department support

**City of Felton** | for fire department support

**City of Forada** | for fire department support

**City of Foxhome** | for fire department support

**City of Hitterdal** | for fire department support

**City of Millerville** | for fire department support

**City of Ogema** | for fire department support

**City of Sedan** | for fire department support

**City of Tintah** | for fire department support

**City of Vining** | for fire department support

**City of Wendell** | for fire department support

**City of Wolf Lake** | for fire department support

**City of Wolverton** | for fire department support

*Thank you to The Funders Network's Community Foundation Disaster Response Fund and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation for providing us with grant dollars to distribute in our region.*

## Resiliency Fund: Building an Equitable Region

**Alexandria Technical and Community College** | for Understanding Bias Training

**Bam'idizowigamig Creator's Place** | for hiring a Creator's Place Coordinator

**Conexiones** | for general operating support

**Enrichment Operation** | for Moorhead Inclusive Community Celebrations

**Fergus Falls Public School District #544** | for the Roosevelt Education Center Teaching Kitchen

**Habitat for Humanity for Douglas County** | for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Toolkit implementation

**Immigrant Development Center** | for COVID-19 recovery

**Moorhead Adult Basic Education** | for family literacy work

**New York Mills Regional Cultural Center** | for belonging work

**Otter Tail County** | for the Empowered Worker Program

**P's & Q's Boys & Girls** | for the Leaderlicious Program

**Safe Families for Children** | for safe families

**Someplace Safe** | for the emergency fund

**Wellness in the Woods** | to support women who have experienced trauma

**West Central Area Schools** | to support REACHing for More

**Women's Initiative Network of Liberia in Cass and Clay Counties** | for the Preparing Children for Academic Success Program

## Resiliency Fund: Building a Sustainable Region

**First Congregational United Church of Christ** | for the Urban Multicultural Food & Ecology Initiative

**Hornets Hive** | for the CornerStone Bistro & Entrepreneurial Program

**Akiing Eighth Fire** | for Akiing Regional Solar Installation Training

**Ogema Organics** | for the Waabishi Apprenticeship Program

**Partnership4Health** | for regional food system planning

**Pedal Fergus Falls** | for Bicycle Friendly Fergus Falls

**Prairie Rose Agriculture Institute for Research, Innovation, and Education** | for the New Roots Farm Incubator Cooperative

**Springboard for the Arts** | for the Sustainability Studio Series

**Sustainable Farming Association** | for the Strengthening our Roots with Deep Roots Festival

## Project Support

**Friends of the Pelican Rapids Public Library** | for a commercial kitchen feasibility study

**Habitat for Humanity for Douglas County** | to support 30 families through the Homeownership and Aging in Place Programs

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Welcome new board members



**Corey Kratcha**  
*Wilkin County*



**Kari Kreft**  
*Grant County*



**Eric Newell**  
*Clay County*



**Elizabeth Pihlaja**  
*Otter Tail County*



**David Schornack**  
*Otter Tail County*



**Tyler Wirth**  
*Douglas County*

## Board members continuing to serve

**Jackie Buboltz**  
*Becker County*

**John Dahlseng**  
*Pope County*

**Barb Fabre**  
*Becker County*  
*White Earth Nation*

**Nicole Fernholz**  
*Douglas County*

**Yoke-Sim Gunaratne**  
*Clay County*

**Laura J. Busian Schmidt**  
*Stevens County*

## STAFF

**Jill Amundson**  
Impact Evaluator

**Sarah Casey**  
Director of Strategic Communications

**Marsha Erickson**  
Early Childhood Specialist

**Deb Hegseth**  
Loan Specialist

**Scott Herron**  
Technology Systems and Data  
Administrator

**Wayne T. Hurley**  
AICP, LCI  
Director of Transportation Planning

**Mallory Jarvi**  
Transportation Planner

**Nancy Jost**  
Director of Early Childhood

**Mark Kaelke**  
Community Planner

**Curtis Klotz**  
Fractional Chief Financial Officer

**Celeste Koppe**  
Rural Initiatives Strategist

**Kate Mudge**  
Business Development Officer

**Kathy Nordick**  
Senior Accounting Manager

**Rebecca Lynn Petersen**  
Director of Development

**Ashley Quam**  
Communications Specialist

**Deb Raasch**  
Accountant

**Rick Schara**  
Community Engagement Specialist

**Lisa Turner**  
Executive Assistant to the President

**Samantha VanWechel-Meyer**  
Community Philanthropy Officer

**Greg Wagner**  
AICP, Director of Business & Economic  
Development

**Anna Wasescha**  
Ph.D., President

## Welcome new team members



**Benjamin Velani**  
*Lead for America Climate  
Fellow - AmeriCorps*



**Heather Weber**  
*Development Specialist*



## GATHERING TO EDUCATE, ACTIVATE, AND CELEBRATE

Over the last two years, we held a series of Convivium events throughout our region. We gathered with new and old friends in Alexandria, Moorhead, and Detroit Lakes—and Morris is our next stop in 2023!

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT BOARD

**Scott Allen**

*Alexandria*

**Jackie Buboltz**

*Detroit Lakes*

**Rick Busko**

*Wilkin County*

**Tim Kalina**

*Douglas County*

**Paul Krabbenhoft**

*Clay County*

**Patricia Lesmeister-Nelson**

*Stevens County*

**Neil Madison**

*Browns Valley*

**Chad Metz**

*Traverse County*

**Kurt Mortenson**

*Otter Tail County*

**Tom Rufer**

*Fergus Falls*

**Richard Vareberg**

*Becker County*

**Dwight Walvatne**

*Grant County*

**Deb White**

*Moorhead*

**Paul Wildman**

*Pope County*

**Kevin Wohlers**

*Morris*



# TOGETHER, WE CAN DO SO MUCH.

Let's partner to create ripples that change our communities,  
our region, and our world for the better—forever.



1000 Western Avenue | P.O. Box 318 | Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0318 | [wcif.org](http://wcif.org)



Call 800-735-2239 or use the QR code to schedule a meeting to learn more.