



# SE MN Together

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A Report from the Field: Evaluating Our Results

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## Executive Summary

SE MN Together was organized by a volunteer group as an experiment in cooperative action in addressing our region's workforce shortage. We worked to engage, encourage, and activate the southeast region through conversation and collaboration with the goal of developing action plans. In February 2015, SMIF (the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation) awarded SE MN Together an \$80,000 Community Growth Initiative grant that required matching in-kind and cash contributions from sponsors. Learning to work together as a region and determining what framework will enable that to happen in the future was a core objective of the SE MN Together project.

The project's four goals were to:

1. align and coordinate workforce solutions;
2. positively grow workforce capacity;
3. actively engage smaller communities; and
4. learn how to plan and collaborate regionally.

## Project Model and Methods

By hosting three community conversations in different areas of the region, as well as a community economic design team process, SE MN Together developed a framework for working together as a region on workforce and other issues related to economic development.

Key elements of the project model included the following:

- Use of sub-regional planning committees to create and recruit participation for the three community conversations. This provided credibility, increased community awareness, and helped generate enthusiasm for the project.
- Creating a venue/forum for information sharing. Bringing people together extended personal and professional networks, and allowed for cross-regional action to develop.
- Conversations designed to allow participants to communicate across sectors and select specific issues, challenges, and actions most relevant to them.
- Focus on action with tangible results. The explicit aim was to move participants beyond identification of issues and needs to creating action plans that could be implemented.
- Use of Social Media, including YouTube, Facebook, and other virtual networks to promote the project, increase awareness, and recruit participation.

## Results

In total, over 300 people participated, most attending one of the three community meetings, and two communities participated in the economic design process. The best-represented industry sectors were business, education, human resources professionals, non-profits, and government. Ten themes emerged from the conversations.

### Themes

- Cultural Diversity
- Welcoming Communities
- Transportation
- Marketing Communities and the Region
- Employer Incentives
- Housing
- School-Business Partnerships, Apprenticeships/Internships/Mentorships, Career Pathways
- Early Childhood Education and Childcare
- Rural Broadband Access
- Regional Framework

## Action Plans

While initial action planning teams covered a diverse range of topics from rural broadband access to regional branding to community childcare solutions, six plans emerged from the process and applied for seed funding:

1. **SE MN Regional Transit**, developing a regional transit resource using Google Transit;
2. **Regional Video Project**, where high school students create videos highlighting their communities and a final SE MN Regional video is produced as a final product. (Partner: Journey to Growth);
3. **SE MN Housing Initiative**, by conducting a regional housing summit, and using a train-the-trainer model, attendees will subsequently hold local community housing summits to address specific local needs related to housing and the workforce;
4. **Diversity and Resource Net** – creating a diversity resource inventory by gathering information on what resources currently exist in our region.
5. **Career Sampler Grant**, providing funding for transportation from schools to worksites so students can learn more about career progression, training requirements, and opportunities within specific companies;
6. **Internships Housing Network** – creating a network of families willing to house interns along with a network of employers willing to help pay for that housing; and,

Projects 1-4 have each been awarded \$5000 from SMIF.

Additionally, the 'Career Pathways' group is working independently. A Regional Career Pathways Coordinator has been hired, and regular meetings of the Regional Career Pathways Taskforce will take place during the summer of 2016, with a report of workforce system strengths, gaps and opportunities due to the legislature and the public at large in 2017.

Another action planning group is working on a regional marketing plan under the Journey to Growth banner. The Journey to Growth marketing initiative gained participants and insights through the conversations.

In addition to action plans, numerous related projects, activities, and collaborations have formed and been enhanced through participation in the SE MN Together project. These include a stronger relationship between SE MN Together and Journey to Growth, and enhanced cross-regional collaboration and information sharing on workforce-related issues.

## Framework for Addressing Regional Issues

As a result of the community meeting and economic design team processes, we have developed components of a framework for working together to address other regional issues:

1. Continue collaboration and conversation as a region;
2. Provide a mechanism for continued support and communication of progress and outcomes;
3. Use local planning teams;
4. Conduct intentional and consistent outreach to smaller communities;
5. Designate staff for regional planning and action efforts; and,
6. Continue to collaborate, but not merge, with other economic development initiatives such as Journey to Growth and Destination Medical Center.

A particular focus of the SE MN Together project was the inclusion and engagement of smaller communities in the region. To make it easier for those communities to participate in future planning efforts, we recommend the following:

1. Use technology to enable access to conversations and planning processes (e.g., webinars, conference calls, automated electronic communication, etc.);
2. Create additional connections to community leaders, local employers and the agriculture sector;
3. Leverage resources to maximize impact;
4. Frame the discussion as mutual benefit rather than competition; and,
5. Provide seed funding

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the Core Team members, as well as the Regional Planning Committee members. Their tireless work ensured not only success for the project objectives, but also continued enthusiasm and action beyond the scope of the funding period. For a full list of Regional Planning Committee members, see Appendix A.

## Core Team

Robert Cline, Chair, UMN Southeast  
Regional Sustainable Development  
Partnership

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Rochester City Lines/Richfield Bus Co.

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Bill Spitzer\*  
Former Mayor of St. Charles

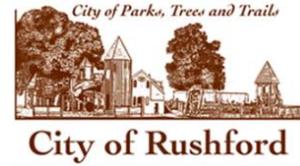
Myron White  
Development Coordinator  
City of Winona Port Authority

Project Coordinator: Bill Spitzer, Former Mayor of St. Charles

Project Evaluator: Jessie Saul, President & CEO, North American Research & Analysis, Inc.

\*Executive Committee Member

## Our Sponsors



## Project Background and Rationale

Six and a half years ago, average unemployment across eleven southeastern Minnesota counties peaked at 8.97 percent. By October 2014, SE MN unemployment rate averages had plummeted to an eight-year low of 2.7 percent. What this means in real terms is that out of an active labor force of 286,950 workers, fewer than 10,000 were unemployed, with over 43,000 unfilled positions waiting for workers. At the same time, current demographic trends have led Steve Hine, Director of the Labor Market Information Office at DEED, to estimate that the region will grow at a rate of only **eight new employees per county per year between now and 2030**.

Combined with the slowing growth of the labor market, Destination Medical Center (DMC) and Journey to Growth (J2G) will add to the demand and labor force shortage. DMC Executive Director, Lisa Clarke, estimates that DMC will create between 25,000 and 45,000 jobs over the next 20 years in the Rochester area. While DMC is a Mayo Clinic project focusing on the city of Rochester and the surrounding areas, Journey to Growth is a project of the Rochester Area Economic Development, Inc. It is a five-year economic development plan created to ensure the future economic viability of the region. Its goal is to diversify and grow the eight-county regional economy beyond healthcare by focusing resources on other growth sectors, leveraging existing regional assets, and developing the regional talent base. However, it does not include the entirety of Region 10, as it excludes Freeborn, Rice, and Steele counties. In addition, it lacks an explicit focus on smaller communities in the region.

Southeast Minnesota is one of two regions in Minnesota that does not have a formal Regional Development Commission. As a result of initiatives such as DMC and J2G that are focused on Rochester and other larger cities and towns in the region, SE Minnesota as a whole needs to develop methods for collaboration and coordination on strategies to address regional issues. In particular, the region needs to include and engage smaller communities in the process.

The workforce shortage is not a prediction of some distant need. Employers throughout the eleven county SE MN Together target region – Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Rice, Steele, Wabasha and Winona – report difficulty finding employees with the right skills to fill job vacancies. Mitigating the workforce shortage is not just about attracting highly skilled technicians and professionals. Employers now and in the future will need to fill jobs at every skill level in every sector. DMC will likely attract medical professionals from future training programs, but nursing homes and senior care facilities around the region already report staff shortages. Manufacturers continue to report a dearth of skilled high-tech equipment operators. Rochester City Lines currently busses workers to SE MN to meet demand for workers. The agriculture sector as well as food processors and meat producers report a continuous need for both seasonal and permanent, skilled employees. According to Ryan Nolander, Executive Director, Albert Lea Economic Development Agency, the labor force is the number one issue businesses ask about when considering a move to the area.

[\(http://www.albertleatribune.com/2015/07/meeting-the-workforce-challenge-a-need-for-workers/\)](http://www.albertleatribune.com/2015/07/meeting-the-workforce-challenge-a-need-for-workers/)

In November 2014, the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation convened 120 people from 30 communities surrounding the Rochester area to analyze assets and design a strategy for collaboration. SMIF developed the Community Grant Initiative (CGI) to bring together community leaders to identify strategies that could position these communities for future growth in responses to Rochester's implementation of Destination Medical Center and Journey to Growth. The counties of Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Olmsted, Steele, Wabasha, and Winona all had community representatives participating in the CGI process.

The Core Team for SEMN Together emerged from the discussion at that event and proposed that workforce issues be the focus of a deeper regional collaboration. Their proposed project was among four selected to advance to full proposal development and consideration for SMIF One Big Thing funding.

SE MN Together was designed to encourage and activate the entire southeast region, especially the smaller communities, to become aware, prepared and ready to work together to address workforce issues. Learning to work together as a region and determining what framework will enable that to happen in the future was a core objective of the SE MN Together project. In February 2015, SMIF (the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation) awarded SE MN Together an \$80,000 community development grant, which required matching in-kind and cash contributions from sponsors. (For a list of our sponsors, see Appendix B.)

The project's four goals were to

5. align and coordinate workforce solutions,
6. positively grow workforce capacity,
7. actively engage smaller communities, and
8. learn how to plan and collaborate regionally.

## **Project Objectives**

The project had two components. The first consisted of hosting three Community Conversations which were designed to empower businesses, civic leaders, workforce development and other community organizations to take leadership on labor force issues for their own community, enter into partnerships and collaborations within the region, and leverage the impacts of the DMC and J2G initiatives as an opportunity. The conversations were organized by representatives from each area of the region (Owatonna, Albert Lea, Winona). Local businesses, colleges, organizations, civic leaders, and workforce agencies were invited to sponsor as well as participate in these sessions.

The second component of the project was a pilot of a Community Economic Design Team in one community which attended the regional conversation and applied to host a design team. Volunteers and experts were recruited based on that community's identified concerns for a 1-2 day in-depth session. Expertise from the University of Minnesota Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership assisted with the development and implementation of the design team pilot.

Based on the experiences from these two components, SE MN Together sought to learn how to develop a regional framework for continued work on other regional issues. In particular, the framework was intended to answer: how will smaller communities' needs become a full component of the regional strategies? Also, what will facilitate smaller communities working in collaboration with others on regional issues?

Finally, outcomes of the project would be assessed and shared through summaries, evaluation survey results, and project reports. This report represents the final project report for SE MN Together.

## **Project Model/Methods**

The SE MN Together project model evolved from a small core group of volunteers, and through the Regional Committees and events expanded out to larger groups of locally interested individuals. Key elements of the project model include the following:

- Establish sub-regional planning committees – since the project focused on three sub-regional community conversations, these planning groups met frequently. The Committees helped design the content of the conversations, and developed a commitment to the success of these events.

Each committee consisted of individuals who were not only interested in the topic of workforce development, but also were connected to their local communities. This facilitated recruiting event participants: the people doing the recruiting already had a strong level of local credibility and support. Committee members used personal connections, organizational networks, and communications channels such as email blasts, newsletters, and Chamber mailings to spread the word about the community conversations. For a list of Sub-regional Planning Committee members, see Appendix A.

- Obtain sponsorships from local businesses – as part of the SMIF grant requirements, project members were required to obtain matching dollars from local businesses. This initial investment in the project added to the credibility and visibility of the project, and generated additional interest and participation in both sub-regional planning committees and the regional conversations.

- Generate relationships based on common interests and needs – At each regional conversation, issues and topics bubbled up through the World Café process which allowed participants to select the specific issues, challenges, and actions that were relevant to them and their work. This encouraged formation of relationships that were immediately useful and relevant to participants.
- Create a venue/forum for information sharing – Perhaps one of the biggest strengths of the SE MN Together project was its ability to bring people together, and focus on the types of information sharing that would lead to effective action. This was mentioned repeatedly in meeting evaluation surveys, and in anecdotal feedback provided to project organizers (see “Testimonials” below). Participants pointed to the tendency to create “silos” for work and planning efforts, and for the need to address issues such as workforce development from a holistic perspective.
- Focus on action with tangible results –SE MN Together focused on achieving actions that would help address the workforce shortage in southeastern Minnesota. The intention to take action was a key component of the recruitment messages that the planning groups developed. Community meetings were carefully designed. Each session began with a presentation by Steve Hine, DEED, who outlined Southeastern Minnesota’s labor force and population trends and possible options. Using a World Café process, experienced facilitators engaged participants in discussing the trends and identification of strategies that could be used.

The explicit aim was to move participants beyond identification of issues and needs, to creating action plans that could be implemented. The importance of this emphasis on action, and the benefits of having trained facilitators at each of the community meetings cannot be overstated.

- Use experienced facilitators to design and host the conversations -- Success in hosting meaningful conversations with large groups of people requires careful design, planning and attention to detail. While these planning elements are not obvious to participants, they are critical to the participants’ experience and the success of the events.
- Use Social Media-- In addition to personal and professional connections, social media was utilized extensively. SE MN Together hired a videographer to create a promotional video highlighting the workforce needs of SE Minnesota, as well as the opportunity to participate in the community conversations. The video was posted on YouTube, and Planning Committee members were asked to distribute the link through social media channels as well as on their organizational web sites. (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUU2f29Boic>). Press releases were created for each

community conversation and distributed to mass media channels. (See Appendix D for a list of resulting media coverage).

Invitations instructed people to register through EventBrite, which allowed for tracking the number of people coming, their organizational affiliation, their town of residence, and the sector they represented (e.g., business, elected official, student, etc.).

## Results

### Community Conversations Participation

Three community conversations were organized by the Core Team and the Regional Planning Committees: Albert Lea (October 29, 2015), Owatonna (November 12, 2015), and Winona (December 3, 2015).

In total, over 300 people participated in one of the three community meetings. The best-represented industry sectors were business, education, human resources professionals, non-profits, and government. Participation rates and industry sectors participating at each meeting are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants and Industry Sectors at the Three Community Meetings**

	<b>Albert Lea</b>	<b>Owatonna</b>	<b>Winona</b>
Number of participants	100	102	112
<b>Industry sectors represented</b>			
Business	32	26	19
Human Resources Professional	20	20	11
Education	19	12	20
Non-profit	14	13	19
Community member	5	4	9
Government	5	16	10
Financial	4	0	4
Economic Development Professional	4	5	12
Elected Official	3	5	5
Diversity professional	0	1	1
Student	0	0	1
Ag	0	0	1

## Themes and Strategies

For each community meeting, project team members used a World Café process. During three successive rounds, meeting participants discussed a question in depth, took notes, and then moved to a different table to maximize the amount of networking and exposure to new ideas. Each round brought participants through the steps of issue identification, ideas for addressing issues related to workforce, and the development of action plans. For a more complete description of the World Café model and protocol that was used, see Appendix C.

While there were some unique features of each of the community meetings, there was a great deal of overlap regarding the types of topics and possible projects/action plans that were discussed. Only two topics (housing and childcare/early education) did not have action planning groups at all three community meetings. Initial action plans coming out of the three community conversations are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Action Planning Groups Formed During the Three Community Meetings**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Facilitator</b>
MARKETING LOCAL/REGION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Our town Videos</b></li> <li><b>Regional Branding</b></li> <li><b>Community Asset Maps</b></li> </ol>	Bill Spitzer Heather Holmes John Katz
EDUCATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Career Pathways</b></li> <li><b>Career Exploration</b></li> <li><b>Apprentice, Mentor, Intern</b></li> <li><b>Career/Technical Education</b></li> </ol>	Randy Johnson Ryan Nolander Dorothy Duran
AFFORDABLE HOUSING		Chad Adams
TRANSPORTATION	<b>Regional Transit Coordination</b>	Brian Carlson
DIVERSITY	<b>Welcoming Communities</b>	Fatima Said
EMPLOYERS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Targeted Surveys</b></li> <li><b>Best employer ranking</b></li> <li><b>Employer Ed/Recruit/Retain</b></li> </ol>	Vickie Koehn Val Kvale Randy Kehr
CHILD CARE/EARLY EDUCATION	<b>Develop options; on-site, all shifts, financing of day care facilities</b>	June Reinike
WELCOME CONCIERGE	<b>Business and new residents</b>	Kristin Olsen
REGIONAL PLANNING	<b>Align EDA groups</b>	Tom Driscoll

## Action Strategy Planning

While not in the original proposal, the Core Team was encouraged to bring all participants together for a region-wide action planning meeting to focus on fleshing out the preliminary plans, and to give like-minded participants a chance to meet with people who had attended a different community meeting. Two sessions were scheduled which allowed a re-emphasis on the regional focus and facilitated additional networking and relationship building across the region.

The fourth meeting took place on February 25, 2016 in Stewartville. 156 people participated, most of whom had also participated in one of the three community conversations. After a brief recap of the purpose for the project and what occurred at the regional meetings, participants were asked to join one of the action planning groups around ten themes:

1. Marketing our communities and region
2. Education
3. Affordable housing
4. Transportation
5. Diversity in the workforce
6. Employer-based incentives, benefits, etc.
7. Child care and early childhood availability
8. Welcoming businesses and newcomers
9. Improved broadband access
10. Regional economic development and planning

Groups were asked to leave the meeting with a plan for moving forward, and to let the organizers know whether they were planning on attending a final action planning meeting which was held on April 1 in Stewartville. At the April 1 meeting, six action plans came forward with the intention of applying for seed funding from SMIF to jump start work on implementation.

## Evaluation results

### Three Community Conversation Evaluation Surveys

Evaluation surveys were fielded at the end of the three regional community meetings in Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Winona. Response rates were 74%, 69%, and 76%, respectively. The **evaluation surveys** asked participants to:

- list one action they will take upon returning home after the meeting;
- identify the key messages or actions they would take back to their communities;
- name the top three critical elements needed for continuing work on a regional basis; and

- name any concerns they had about a regional approach to workforce development and other issues.

Participants reported **planning to take action** in numerous areas, including:

- developing better school-business relationships;
- sharing the information they learned about the state of the workforce and its future with their company/organization and community;
- reviewing their organization’s benefits packages; and
- working to market their community in new and creative ways.

The evaluation surveys also included two questions that asked participants to rate how helpful they think it is to frame the conversation about workforce development from a regional perspective and how interested they were to continue regional conversations about other topics in the future. Average scores for all three conversations were between “very” and “extremely” helpful/interested. Results are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Evaluation Survey Results for Scaled Questions for the Three Community Conversations**

	Albert Lea Average Score (Min,Max)	Owatonna Average Score (Min,Max)	Winona Average Score (Min,Max)
How helpful is it to frame the conversation about workforce development from a regional perspective? (1=not at all helpful, 5=extremely helpful)	4.6 (3,5)	4.5 (3,5)	4.5 (3,5)
How interested are you in continuing regional conversations about other topics in the future? (1=not interested at all, 5=extremely interested)	4.4 (2,5)	4.4 (3,5)	4.5 (3,5)

While there was great enthusiasm and energy generated by the community conversations, participants also voiced concerns about taking a regional approach to the workforce issue. Primarily, **participants were concerned** that:

- larger cities might dominate the conversation, leaving smaller communities out;
- real or perceived competition between cities and sub-regions might be a barrier to working together; and
- community “conversations” would fail to lead to real action, especially when the Southeast Region is quite large.

### February 25 Combined Communities Meeting

At the February 25 meeting, we fielded a slightly different evaluation survey that answered key questions about the impact of SE MN Together on participants.

- 88% of February 25 meeting participants said “yes” or “definitely yes” that SE MN Together's conversations **increased their awareness** of our workforce issues and the opportunities to work together to resolve them.”
- 64% of February 25 meeting participants reported **they had taken action** on workforce issues as an outcome of attending one of the regional community conversations. Of those who reported not having already taken action, 88% reported planning to take action.
- When asked about the value of SE MN Together, participants emphasized the **networking and connections** SE MN Together has created, particularly around specific topics of interest such as childcare, AIM, and housing. **Sharing information and raising awareness** of workforce issues was the other major value added that was mentioned by participants.
- 83% of February 25 meeting participants reported feeling “confident” or “very confident” **that they can take action or have a role** on labor force issues in their community.

## Outcomes and Actions

When reporting on outcomes resulting from SE MN Together, it is important to note that there was an incredible amount of activity on workforce development going on prior to this project. What SE MN Together was designed to do was not to introduce workforce development as a concept to communities, but rather, to start conversation and action that would facilitate addressing the topic from a regional perspective. With that in mind, the **primary outcomes** we are reporting on are the **action planning teams** that are moving forward with projects that arose out of SE MN Together discussions. Secondly, we are also reporting on “offshoot” activities and outcomes that can be attributed, at least in part, to the conversations that have occurred at SE MN Together events. While many of these “success stories” were started well before SE MN Together came into being, many participants credit the networking they were able to do and the conversations they had during the regional meetings, as enhancing their ability, enthusiasm, and sense of urgency for continuing their work and expanding their network of like-minded people.

## Action Planning Teams

After the three community conversations took place, all participants were invited to gather in Stewartville, MN for action planning sessions. Further planning took place around seven topics and six were presented at the end of the second session with the intention of submitting proposals for seed funding from SMIF. The six projects are outlined below.

1. **SE MN Regional Transit** – This project is designed to be completed in several phases. Phase I collaborators are all transit providers in the region. Goals include convening a meeting of transit providers to share data for mapping all current routes,

and to catalyze collaboration among providers. An RFP will be written for a vendor to take all transit information from all providers and put it on Google Transit. Measures of success include participation at the meeting, number/percent of transit providers collaborating, ability to pull transit data through the google transit app, and accessibility of transit options to all residents in the region. The first meeting with providers will occur by June 30 during which an RFP will be prepared. The bidding process will take place from July 1-July 31 with the RFP completion and sponsors/fiscal agent identified. The winning bidder will be identified by September 30. During October and November, next steps will be identified for Phase II. The target date for Google Transit to go live is December 31, 2016.

2. **Diversity and resource net** – This project proposes to create a diversity resource inventory by gathering information on what resources currently exist in our region. There was a great deal of conversation throughout the SE MN Together project about how to make our region, communities, and worksites more welcoming for newcomers of all kinds, and especially for migrants and refugees. This project aims to collect and make available a reference/resource list that can be accessed online that will make it easier for anyone interested in recruiting or employing diverse populations to do so. Collaborators will include government agencies, the private sector, educational institutions, non-profit agencies, and religious organizations.
3. **Regional video project** - Journey to Growth and SE MN Together are partnering to develop a regional video project. High school students in the region will be invited to create a short video that will introduce their community to others. Each community has fascinating and unique features. Students will be asked to create a video that raises awareness and understanding about their community in a compelling, visually stimulating, fun and unique way. The project aims to have video submissions from 7-12 communities. Completed videos will be housed in a central social media channel (e.g., YouTube) where they can be publicly searched. Paid advertising will be used to drive traffic to the videos. Based on knowledge obtained from the videos, a professionally produced SE MN Regional video will be developed. The video can then be used for various campaigns such as site selectors for new businesses, families looking to move, recruitment campaigns, etc. Kingsland School District and others are already interested in participating.
4. **SE MN Housing Initiative** – The goals of this project are as follows:
  - a. Conduct a regional housing summit with local, regional, and national experts in the housing industry (builders, lenders, city officials).
  - b. Train community facilitators (2-3) from each community to conduct local community housing summits that address specific local needs.

- c. Identification of specific local needs for housing within many SE MN communities.
- d. Research good case studies from other communities that can tell their stories.

Measures of success will include an increase in building activity in SE MN, and creating an educational toolkit to help grow housing in communities. The project will be completed by December 31, 2016.

5. **Career Sampler grant** – The Career Sampler group is proposing a project where 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> grade educators can apply for a \$500 transportation grant in order to build career awareness for students by providing a career pathway tour in a local business. For each community, collaborators will include the school district, a busing/transportation company, and a local business(es). The goals of the project are to increase the number of AIM applicants and the number of permanent placements from AIM programs. The primary strategy that will be used to achieve these goals is providing Career Sampler (transportation) Grants. Through company tours, students will learn about how different careers progress within a company, what education is required for different positions, and what impact the business has on the community. Businesses will benefit from their participation by being able to influence their future workforce, and retain a workforce for the future. It is proposed that by providing experiential learning opportunities through the tours, businesses will continue to develop other learning opportunities (AIM). Measures of success will include changes in student knowledge about career pathways (pre/post tour), the number of students applying for AIM opportunities, and the number of permanent placements coming from AIM participants. The project is designed to be sustainable by requiring a \$500 matching grant from the business(es) to sustain future grants. One fiscal host option is the Rochester Chamber Foundation.
6. **Internships Housing Network** – This project is designed to fill the gap left by businesses wanting to hire short-term interns, but having nowhere for those people to live. The goal of this project is to create a prototype/model network of families willing to house interns with a network of employers willing to help pay for part of that housing. Collaborators for each SE MN city would include city officials, employers in that community, and the local housing authority and/or chamber of commerce. Project milestones include: 1) Determining employer interest in participation, 2) Determining housing availability interest, 3) identifying others for future implementation, and 4) developing a plan for ongoing coordination. The project will be completed by December 31, 2016.

Of these six projects, four applied and all have been awarded \$5000 of seed funding by SMIF: **SE MN Regional Transit, Diversity and Resource Net, Regional “Our Town” Video Project, and SE MN Housing Initiative.**

Additionally, one project is continuing to work independently. As a result of numerous 'Career Pathways' initiatives taking root in SE MN over the past few years, and with the impetus of the new federal Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, a regional collaboration of service providers was formed in August of 2015 for the purpose of sharing best practices. With the input of other regional studies, such as SE MN Together, a finer point was brought to the mission, in that the various career pathways from critical industry sectors need to be mapped out and shared throughout the region in order to support a common vision. Most recently, an allocation was awarded to the 11 county region of SE MN by the State legislature to support the hiring of a Regional Career Pathways Coordinator. Susan Boehm has been hired to fill that role, starting April 2016. Under her direction on May 5, 2016 the Regional Career Pathways Taskforce was re-convened in Rochester for two days of training and national certification of providers as "Career Pathways Leaders." This is the first group of people who will have such training in the State. Regular meetings of this Regional Career Pathways Taskforce will commence this summer, with a report of workforce system strengths, gaps and opportunities due to the legislature and the public at large in 2017. For more information contact Randy Johnson at Workforce Development, Inc., rjohnson@wfdi.ws, Phone: 507-292-5189

Another action planning group is working on a regional marketing plan under the Journey to Growth banner. While there was a great deal of interest and discussion on marketing the region during the SE MN Together regional conversations, it was decided that since Journey to Growth already had a plan in place to develop a regional marketing plan, anyone interested in those efforts would join with Journey to Growth. For more information, contact Heather Holmes, VP of Marketing, Journey to Growth & Rochester Area Economic Development, Inc., Hholmes@RAEDI.com.

## **Success Stories**

In addition to the formal project teams that have assembled, there have been numerous success stories of connections that have been forged, opportunities seized, and actions taken as a result of the conversations begun through SE MN Together.

### **Stronger Regional Relationship with Journey to Growth (J2G)**

J2G is an initiative led by Rochester Area Economic Development, Inc. (RAEDI), and seeks to diversify the Rochester-area economy by focusing on sectors other than health care in response to and collaboration with DMC. J2G seeks to expand the focus from Rochester and Olmsted County to a more regional approach, and currently includes an eight-county “Region without Borders.” SE MN Together core team members currently serve on J2G workgroups and provide communication and coordination links between the two initiatives to

ensure efforts are not duplicated and resources are leveraged where possible. Some examples:

- 1- SE MN Together's decision not to pursue a regional marketing strategy given that J2G is seeking to lead development of a regional brand and a plan for marketing the region.
- 2- There has been a direct collaboration between J2G and SE MN Together to develop videos highlighting the unique features and stories of communities in the region in partnership with local high schools (see Action Planning Teams above for more details).
- 3-
- 3- J2G has been able to identify and recruit new Board members from Winona and Owatonna through the connections made at our Regional Conversations. SE MN Together's Co-chair Natalie Siderius is now a J2G Board member.
- 4- The Regional Conversations created connections between the J2G Workforce subcommittee and a Waseca based company called Cinch. Cinch had developed an Apprenticeship Program model which falls in line with current efforts of the J2G Workforce subcommittee.

SE MN Together's focus on inclusion of smaller communities and active use of regional planning committees has continues to contribute perspective to the work of J2G, bridge the gaps, both real and perceived, between Rochester and the rest of the region.

In the coming year SE MN Together intends to continue to seek to engage, communicate and collaborate with J2G on projects that address shared priorities.

### **Albert Lea Workshops on 'Workforce Solutions'**

A group of participants from the Albert Lea meeting have developed three workshops on "Workforce Solutions" as a result of their experiences with SE MN Together. The workshops take place on April 21, May 19, and June 16, and focus on revisiting and potentially revising hiring policies and practices. The workshops will piggy-back on the monthly meetings of the Albert Lea HR group. Topics of each "lunch and learn" session will focus on Diversity/Inclusion, Millennials, and Older Workers respectively. Each workshop will have a presenter-led session on the different employment needs of each group, how to attract and recruit them, and other topics. Registration will be handled through the Albert Lea Freeborn County Chamber. For more information, contact Valerie Kvale at 507.402.7294.

### **School Career Awareness Event**

Modeled after a similar annual event in Rochester that draws over 2000 students, the STEAM-AHEAD event was designed to be a hands on, career exploring event for middle school students, and



other students looking at their future careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. Employers were encouraged to participate as a way to attract and recruit students as future employees. Austin, Albert Lea, and Owatonna collaborated to put on the event, and it will rotate to each of the three cities over the next three years. The event was held on April 28, 2016, in Austin. Over 1,000 students attended from 11 schools. At the event, eighth-graders got a chance to interact with dozens of local employers, see live demos, and try out their equipment -- from firefighting gear to tools that lineworkers use. Some students even got to try on suits that simulate the effects of aging. The goal was to help those interested in becoming nurses better understand the needs of the elderly. Next year's event will be held in Owatonna. For more information, contact Jen Hauzer ([jen.hauzer@state.mn.us](mailto:jen.hauzer@state.mn.us)).

### **Seven Rivers Alliance Regional Seminar on Workforce Recruitment and Retention**

In an effort to spread the message and continue the conversations started through SE MN Together, the Seven Rivers Alliance offered a regional seminar for business leaders, hiring executives, and HR professionals on April 28 in Rushford, MN. Natalie Siderius, Economic Development and Sustainability Director for Winona County, and Steve Sarvi, Winona City Manager, presented the keynote address focusing on SE MN Together and the action plans that are moving forward. Other presentation topics included:

- Strategies for Recruiting & Retaining Millennial Workers
- Creating Talent Pipeline Programs with High Schools
- Building Relationships with Community Organizations to Support a Diverse Workforce
- State Workforce Forecasts
- Innovative Incentives and Benefits to Attract and Retain Workers
- Strategies for Opening Doors for Non-traditional Workers

For more information, contact Megan Sukovich, Marketing & Communications Intern, The 7 Rivers Alliance, 608-787-8777, [megan@7riversalliance.org](mailto:megan@7riversalliance.org).

### **Promoting Diversity in the Workforce**

In response to conversations about creating inclusive and welcoming environments for newcomers to SE MN, staff from Workforce Development, Inc. incorporated some of the information and statistics they had heard at the community meetings into conversations with local businesses. Workforce Development, Inc. has a P2P (Pathways to Prosperity – Manufacturing Sector) grant that is targeted at immigrant, refugee, and incumbent workers to provide them with critical services and assistance (English, Math, OSHA-10, and work readiness training). After talking with WDI staff, an HR representative at Tru Vue mentioned that she had some great employees, but noted they are struggling with their English. As a result, Workforce Development, Inc. is partnering with the Faribault ABE to pursue offering ESL classes at the worksite.

Additionally, WDI has two other projects that are explicitly designed to make it easier for immigrants and refugees who need additional help with English in order to succeed in the workplace. WDI now has a Skills to Succeed class teaching American workplace culture and work readiness that meets weekly. The Skills to Succeed class gets referrals from HRA-The Family Self Sufficiency Program. Finally, WDI will begin a Pilot Project with Hiawatha Transit in May for individuals interested in becoming bus drivers. Hiawatha's Instructor will work with WDI's interpreter to teach the curriculum and this will take place for three hours once a week.

In addition, Project FINE is playing an important role in the Winona area connecting employers with immigrant populations. Through the SE MN Together conversations, participants learned that businesses are not aware of the diverse resources available in their communities. While they are interested in attracting diverse workers, often the relationships and inclusive practices are not in place, leading to either not hiring or not retaining diverse employees. As a result of the connections made through SE MN Together, Project FINE from Winona plans to develop a resource guide for the region, which will include a list of existing resources and best practices. They will also provide training for employers in early 2017, with the intent of providing tools to build inclusive hiring practices and bring employers new ideas to retain diverse workers. This will be a benefit for employers across our region, as they will be better prepared to tap into a currently underutilized population.

### **Expanded Focus on Career Education and AIM**

There have been several efforts in support of furthering school-business collaboration and connection, in addition to or as offshoots of the formal projects listed above that are moving forward. Several SE MN Together participants have reached out to local businesses to see if they would be interested in apprenticeships or internships with students. The Albert Lea Education Foundation hired a project director to serve as a liaison between business/industry and the local school district to lead work on creating a mentorship, internship, job shadowing program that can introduce local students to the career opportunities available in Albert Lea. While the position was posted prior to SE MN Together holding the regional community conversations, the potential for such a position to transform workforce development efforts in the Albert Lea area, and to be replicated in other places, was a topic of conversation at the Albert Lea meeting and elsewhere. One participant conducted a Rochester Workforce & Continuing Education focus group in early February to determine education needs along with workforce issues.

### **Albert Lea Concierge Program**

Albert Lea has started its own concierge program, on a small scale, modeled after the one in Austin. The idea was generated after hearing Austin's concierge speak at the Albert Lea community meeting.

### Expansion of Inter-City Transit

As a result of the regional meeting in Albert Lea, a Hormel representative approached Rochester City Lines to discuss the possibility of establishing bus service between Rochester and Austin. Bus service has run between the two cities for many years, with three departures from Austin in the morning to Rochester, and three returns from Rochester to Austin in the evening. As a result of the conversations between Hormel and Rochester City Lines, a new service has started for Hormel Employees that come from Rochester to Austin in the morning and from Austin (Hormel) to Rochester in the evening. These people had been carpooling before the bus service started. The motor coach stops at Hormel Corporate North and South.

### Transit Training Partnerships

Because of the connections established through SE MN Together, Riverland Community College Truck Driver Training Program has partnered with Rochester City Lines. RCL will provide an MCI motor coach to Riverland for a \$1 lease so Riverland students can train students to receive passenger endorsements as well as truck driving endorsements. Students will now be able to receive hands on training on doubles, dry bulk tankers, 53' van trailers, flat beds, and with the RCL partnership, motor coaches. By working with a carrier in each division, students will be able to access a direct pathway into the segment upon graduation. In addition, Riverland and South Central College just entered into a new venture where Riverland will be running its 16 week, 22 credit truck driving program on the North Mankato, South Central College campus. A class will be going in Mankato or Austin every 12 weeks which will effectively double their training capacity and output. The ribbon cutting ceremony took place on March 25 (see photos).



Left photo: Ribbon cutting ceremony for the Riverland/South Central Truck Driving Program partnership.

Right photo: From left to right: Jonathan Rymer Director/lead instructor, Riverland Community College Truck Driver Training Program; Joe Jacobson, Rochester city Lines; Adenuga Atewologun, Riverland Community College President.

### **Strategic Benefits Changes**

Because of the discussions had at the SE MN Together planning sessions, the Director of Human Resources for Home and Community Options returned to work determined to change recruiting strategies and benefits options that may be more interesting to younger generations entering the workforce. Since SE MN Together, they have added a Flexible Spending Account to their benefit packages that they offer full-time employees. According to Cari McCann, Director of HR, “We have had slow participation in this new benefit, but all that are participating LOVE this plan.” Home and Community Options has also deployed more technology, making it possible for many employees to complete more of their jobs remotely instead of being required to come back to a central location to complete required documentation.

### **On-Site Daycare**

Home and Community Options also renewed conversations about providing internal extended hour daycare for their employees, and began talking about what that might look like if they offered it to the community as a resource as well. Home and Community Options currently has a daycare license in combination with their 245D license at one of their resource homes. Extended hours daycare (until 10 p.m.) used to be offered to employees but was ended because of low utilization. The idea of extended hours daycare has been revisited since HR Director Cari McCann participated in SE MN Together because they have a new wave of employees who have expressed possible interest in the service. “Our thoughts were if we offered this to our employees and it was well received; just think of what we could do for our community.” No formal action has been taken on this yet as of April 2016. (Cari McCann, Director of HR, Home and Community Options, Inc.)

### **Online Clearinghouse for Workforce Issues**

The Rochester Chamber of Commerce has been developing an electronic “hub” for a variety of workforce issues. The Regional Conversations provided additional input and insights for the development of this new regional workforce information resource. A software developer has been hired to create beta version of the electronic portal/clearinghouse

### **Press Coverage and Other Awareness Building Efforts**

SE MN Together has been very active in getting the word out about its efforts and events. Press releases leading up to and following each of the community conversations has generated numerous articles in regional news outlets. For a list of news coverage related to SE MN Together, see Appendix D.

In addition, SE MN Together core team members have been asked to present on our efforts at several events, including the following:

- SE MN Day at the Capitol, St. Paul, MN. March 15, 2016. Introduction of SE MN Together, education about workforce shortage and our project’s impact so far.

- Greater Rochester Advocates for Universities and Colleges (GRAUC) Board, Rochester Community and Technical College, Rochester, MN, March 25, 2016. Introduction of SE MN Together and its impact so far.
- SE MN League of Municipalities, Elgin, MN. Invited to present at next quarterly meeting on July 27, 2016.
- 7-Rivers Alliance, Seven Rivers Alliance Regional Seminar on Workforce Recruitment and Retention. Rushford, MN. April 28, 2016. In an effort to spread the message and continue the conversations started through SE MN Together, the Seven Rivers Alliance offered a regional seminar for business leaders, hiring executives, and HR professionals on April 28 in Rushford, MN. Natalie Siderius, Economic Development and Sustainability Director for Winona County, and Steve Sarvi, Winona City Manager, presented the keynote address focusing on SE MN Together and the action plans that are moving forward.

## Testimonials

One of the ways that SE MN Together has had an impact on workforce issues, planning, and action has been the act of bringing people together. Several participants have explicitly mentioned the value of this convening work in evaluation survey responses after each of the project meetings, as well as in email communication to project leaders. A sample of such sentiments is provided below.

*“I want to take a moment to thank you and your core team for your efforts on SE Minnesota Together. My primary involvement has been on Regional Transit & Transportation issues, and I am pleased to report that our sub- group is at a significantly stronger position of knowledge because of your efforts to drive SEMNT discussions. The result of your effort is a group that does meet “outside of SEMNT sponsored events” and is making steady progress toward several goals, many of which were shared at the April 1<sup>st</sup> SEMNT gathering in Stewartville. The true value will be our ability to document our plan, engage our stakeholders in the region, and meet our stated goals of growing our use of transit resources to meet the workforce needs of SE Minnesota. Were it not for your organizational efforts and the financial assistance from Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, we would not have engaged all the players to initiate this process.” –Brian Carlson, Widseth Smith Nolting, Rochester*

*“Even though I’m pretty well connected within the area, this has brought me into a different work relationship with many people I knew but did not know well. I am excited about the planning committee for these workshops and to see them be of value and well-attended. I have also seen an improved working relationship with our local newspaper; they connect with me for information, statistics, etc.” February 25 meeting participant*

*“I was able to meet many people at the same time who were all invested enough to spend most of a day on the subjects. I thought that was very powerful and made it easier to just jump right in.”* February 25 meeting participant.

*“The ideas and comments of other members really opens your eyes to what is happening within the community and within other organizations.”* February 25 meeting participant

*“I coordinate a CTE [Career and Technical Education] Advisory Board of school, community and business people in Red Wing. [In addition,] I participate in our local Manufacturing group. Many manufacturers, government and school officials and others meet monthly to discuss manufacturing needs in the area. And I am working to develop career pathways programming for students at my school. My aim is to support students in thinking about what their post-secondary plan is. All of these were in place prior to SE MN Together. It has been helpful to be able to state the connection with SE MN Together at meetings for the various groups and to get buy in from teachers around their role to support students in their post-secondary plans. The initiatives support each other and highlight the drastic need.”* February 25 meeting participant

*“I had several moments that forced me to think about how I could be part of the solution. I remember a gentleman commenting in our Owatonna SE MN Event group...that our community is welcoming but it’s not inclusive. His words I couldn’t shake. I then asked myself...how am I championing inclusivity in my personal life and at work? I think it’s important that once we leave the group setting we ask ourselves to take personal responsibility for that which we can change.”* Regional Planning Group member.

## Challenges Experienced

For a large, complex project, SE MN Together experienced relatively few serious challenges. There was adequate buy-in from the beginning from all parts of the region, in part due to the strong interest in finding ways to work together as a region and the opportunity to do so because of the gravity and urgency of the workforce shortage in the region, and in part due to the work of the sub-regional planning teams to promote the project and its purpose.

One of the biggest challenges to SE MN Together's success was the struggle throughout the project to engage a significant number of the smallest communities in the region. While there was consistent and meaningful engagement from the "larger" communities in the region (e.g., Albert Lea, Austin, Owatonna, Faribault, Northfield, Winona, Red Wing, Rochester), and while some of the core team members represented smaller communities (e.g., Rushford, St. Charles), the reach into most of the smallest communities in the region was limited – only 10-20% of community conversation participants were from smaller cities other than those named above.

We suspect this occurred for several reasons, including:

- Limited time, staffing, and resources in the smallest communities to participate. (e.g., the Mayor of a small town might be an unpaid position, the work of which gets done in the evenings and on weekends.) This will continue to be a challenge to engaging the smallest communities in our region, and one we will need to consider carefully.
- Limited representation of the Southeast Region's smallest communities on the sub-regional planning committees. This is an issue we will address with any future work that is proposed or undertaken.
- Access challenges – for some of the smallest communities, even the distance to the community conversation sites may have been too great to make participation possible. For any work moving forward, we plan to take greater advantage of technology to make virtual participation much easier, which should alleviate this particular challenge.

Additional challenges included:

- Volunteer project team – with the exception of the halftime project coordinator and the contracted project evaluator, the entirety of the work completed for SE MN Together was done by volunteers. While we were extraordinarily successful in working together and achieving our goals, that level of effort is not sustainable for multiple years. We have developed a model for moving forward, but to do so we will need to find an institutional home for the project, and more of an organizational commitment to direct the project by paid staff. This will ensure stability, consistency, and sustainability for the work moving forward.
- Geography – the region is a large place. Most meetings were face to face, and while most of the planning for the community meetings took place at or near the location of the meeting itself, core team meetings typically took place in the eastern part of the region,

making it more of a challenge for residents of the western part of the region to participate regularly. Virtual participation via technology will be a strategy we use to address this challenge moving forward, should the project continue.

## Community Economic Design Team

In addition to the community conversations, SE MN Together wanted to offer at least one community access to expertise and trial an “economic design team” visit. The goal was to assess needs and develop a plan and "toolbox" to establish a road map for future development by engaging expertise that may not be easily or normally accessible to smaller communities in the SE MN region. Announcements at each community conversation and an email sent to participants of all three convenings encouraged applications. Six communities expressed interest. Three formally applied using a simple form asking for contact information, identification of two project leads, two community assets, and two challenges to development. The SE MN Together core committee selected two communities: Goodview and Oronoco.

Introductory meetings were held to document needs, challenges, opportunities, and aspirations and to target individual invitations to participate on the design team from these groups:

- Minnesota Economic Development Foundation
- SE MN Together core team members
- University of Minnesota
  - Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partners
  - Extension
  - The EDA Center at the University of Minnesota Crookston
  - College of Design, various units
  - Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
  - Humphrey School of Public Affairs

A final report on the Community Economic Design Team’s activities and outcomes will be available in Fall 2016.

## Framework for addressing regional issues

SE MN Together participants at the February 25 meeting were asked several questions designed to help us identify a framework, or guiding principles, for addressing issues as a region. First and foremost, participants pointed to the **need for continued collaboration and conversation**. They emphasized the value of bringing people together from across the region to share what is happening in local communities, establish relationships and formal partnerships, and work together to leverage resources and avoid duplication of efforts or “siloed” action. However, they

also noted that if we want to engage EDAs, chambers of commerce, city councils, and smaller communities without a great deal of resources or staff, we need to continue to conduct proactive outreach to them. One participant stated “We must go to them because they aren’t coming to us.” When conducting such **outreach to smaller communities**, it was emphasized that the information we provide must be tailored and defined specifically for the needs of those types of communities. For example, toolkits could be developed that each community could tailor for their own needs.

Several participants pointed to the critical need for **designated staffing for regional efforts**. While SE MN Together has been extremely successful at generating enthusiasm, interest, and action, all core team members have done so on a volunteer basis. Participants were quick to point out that when regional efforts are not “someone’s day job,” those efforts tend to wane quickly. As one person stated, “one person, as a project director, [must] have the responsibility and accountability to drive action and outcomes.” Some people suggested that an Economic Development Agency or other similar entity be created for the region.

Other suggestions that could make it easier for smaller communities to work on labor force issues and other regional issues included making **more connections directly to local employers, leveraging resources together, and framing the discussion as a mutual benefit**, “us [SE MN] against the world” rather than community vs. community.

When asked for advice regarding SE MN Together continuing to work together, several themes arose:

- **Make it easy for people to participate.** Many people had to travel in order to participate in one or more meetings. Participants emphasized the benefit of local meetings, or virtual participation in larger meetings, in terms of participation rates and ease of access.
- **Use local planning teams.** Many people commented on the link between the success of the three community meetings, and the composition of the regional planning teams. By tying into their networks and local credibility, potential participants were more positively inclined to attend the first meetings.
- **Use experienced facilitators to design and host the conversations.** The Core Team had three members with many years of experience in designing and hosting large group conversations. Success in hosting meaningful conversations requires careful planning and attention to details that are not obvious to participants.
- **Provide seed funding.** “Money makes the world go ‘round.” By providing a small incentive or starter fund for some of this work, individuals have an easier time convincing employers or other groups to participate.
- **Provide a mechanism for continued support and communication of progress and outcomes.** Newsletter or email updates were suggested as a way to facilitate continued communication and participation. However, the value of physically meeting together was emphasized by many. One idea was raised to have SE MN Together host spring and fall

“reunions” or to co-host SE MN Regional Economic Summits. Another was to continue to have annual conversation processes like the one that took place this year, shifting the topic as needs arise.

- A consistent theme throughout the meetings and later conversations was to **continue to actively recruit smaller communities** to participate in these conversations and in regional efforts.

## Next steps, and needed actions

Given the high degree of success of the SE MN Together project, several possible next steps should be considered.

- **Determine what elements of SE MN Together will continue moving forward.** The Core Team is currently in discussion about the model that will be used to continue efforts in workforce development as a region. There is a strong desire on the part of participants for regional meetings to continue, and for SE MN Together (or some similar entity) to continue to facilitate taking action on workforce and other issues. SE MN Together’s value was perceived as being highest with respect to its convening, communication, and networking role. The Core Team is pursuing possible options for finding an institutional home for the work moving forward, as well as opportunities for identifying paid staff to continue the work. If sufficient funding and institutional support can be engaged over the next 3-6 months, the Core Team is confident that the model that has been developed over the past year can continue to be used to convene stakeholders from around the region to discuss issues related to workforce and sustainable economic development, and develop action plans to address those issues as they arise.
- **Continue evaluating outcomes, impact, and successes over time.** While action plans have been developed, and initial outcomes and success stories have been identified, work in the area of economic development, workforce, and other regional issues take time to bear fruit. It is strongly suggested that SE MN Together continue to assess the impact it has had over the next 12 months or longer.
- **Staffing:** Many volunteer hours were contributed by Core Team members in addition to the contracted coordinator and evaluator. This level of activity cannot be maintained with volunteers alone. If actions are to continue, and not lose momentum, there will need to be funding generated for paid staff to coordinate efforts across the region.
- **Communication to Build Momentum;** Regional approaches will work best if we are able to continue to communicate our efforts and successes to each other. In addition, the more we can make solutions “plug and play” for easy transfer from one city to the next, the better off we will be.

## Conclusion

SE MN Together accomplished the goals laid out in its initial proposal, and much more. It is clear from the enthusiasm and participation in the three community meetings that workforce is an issue that can bring people together across the region, not only to talk about the problems facing our cities and employers, but also to take concrete, positive action. In addition, there was strong support for working together as a region to create and leverage possible solutions. This support was tempered with ongoing concerns about the role and voice of the smallest communities in the region, which was borne out by our limited reach into those communities throughout the project. However, we have learned a great deal about what works with respect to outreach to, and engagement of, key stakeholders. Proactive, targeted outreach, as well as the use of technology to facilitate access, are two strategies we will use moving forward should the project's efforts continue.

Several action plans have been developed as a result of the SE MN Together project, and many have developed project teams or have staff assigned and have begun work. Not all projects requested or required seed funding.

It is clear that the process of bringing people together to network, share success stories, and generate new ideas and partnerships has been fruitful in generating awareness, enthusiasm, and action in the area of workforce. We believe the model we have developed can be a useful tool for continuing to refine and create a framework for regional collaboration on a number of issues. Components of such a framework will need to include:

- Local planning teams, and local (or virtual) access to meetings and events
- Communication and conversation on both a sub-regional and regional level – what is happening, what is working, what can be used elsewhere easily and effectively? We need a process for continued and consistent communication.
- Staffing and more formal agreements between organizations will be required for regional efforts to advance and be sustained. Only so much progress can be made through volunteers, no matter how dedicated.
- Tools and mechanisms to share results, outcomes, and impact across the region

Interest and enthusiasm remains high to continue to work together. The SE MN Together project Core Team continues to refine plans for future work, and the structures within which that work will have the best chance of success. We are hopeful that the right combination of funding, staffing, and partnerships will continue to emerge over the next several months that will make the next phase of our work together possible.

## **Appendix A: Regional Planning Committees\***

### **Owatonna/Faribault area**

Adenuga Atewologun  
Pam Bishop,  
Brian Coleman  
Sonji Davis  
Jen Hauzer  
Brian Knutson  
Deanna Kuennen  
Jennifer Libby  
Yesica Louis  
Mark Olchefske  
Annette Parker

### **Winona/Rochester area**

Hamid Akbari  
Dorothy Duran  
Jessica Ganrude  
Arlette Gensmer  
Dallas Groten  
Rollin Hall  
Mike Haney  
Josh Hessler  
Vicky Koehn  
Gabriel G Manrique  
Tarrell Portman  
Joshua Sande  
Steve Sarvi  
Della Schmidt

### **Austin/Albert Lea area**

Chad Adams  
Dr. Adenuga Atewologun  
Pam Bishop  
Craig Clark  
Beth Goskesen  
Randy Kehr  
Valerie Kvale  
Betsy Lindgren  
Joe Lubke  
Ryan Nolander  
Kristen Olson  
Dale Wicks

\*Executive Committee and Core Team Members are not listed, but often participated.

## **Appendix B: Partner and Sponsor Organizations**

AcenTek

Bremer Bank

City of Owatonna

City of Rushford

City of St. Charles

Dairyland Power Cooperative

Fillmore County

Freeborn Mower Cooperative Services

Growing Winona County, Economic Development Authority

Mayo Clinic

The Mentor Network

Minnesota Workforce Council Association

People's Energy Cooperative

Riverland Community College

Rochester City Lines

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

Tri-County Electric Cooperative

University of Minnesota, Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership

Winona State University, Adult & Continuing Education

Winona State University, College of Business

Winona State University, College of Education

Xcel Energy

## Appendix C: World Café Process Used for Community Meetings

Each community conversation began with a presentation by Steve Hine, Director of the Labor Market Information Office at DEED, consisting of data and statistics from the state demographer. He traced the events leading up to the current worker shortage, projected into the future to see what we might expect if current population trends continue, and discussed potential options for improving workforce numbers with a focus on particular populations. Mr. Hine gave the same presentation at each meeting.



Following the keynote address, the meeting followed a World Café format. Attendees were assigned to tables to encourage networking and conversations between people who did not normally work together. Three rounds of conversation occurred, with a different guiding question for each round.

ROUND 1: What are your concerns about workforce recruitment and retention in your community or industry? Share a story from your experience.



ROUND 2: What will bring and keep people to live and work in our communities? What is already working or shows promise?

ROUND 3: What actions could or should we pursue now to help us get there? (Each person was asked to write down three)

Between each round, people were asked to move to a different table to ensure they were able to meet and

speak with as many participants as possible.

At the end of Round 3, participants were asked to identify which ideas or issues were emerging as opportunities for action. Each table was asked to report on the idea that came up most frequently among those at their table, which would have the most impact if we worked on it further, and which would be the easiest to do. Participants were also asked to report on anything that was novel or surprising.



Round four consisted of action planning. Ideas for action were grouped into themes, and participants were asked to gather with others who were interested in creating an action plan to address one of the themes that had emerged over the course of the day. Each group was asked to identify what they were ready to do at this time and what resources were needed to take action together.

## Appendix D: Press Coverage Related to SE MN Together

Event	News coverage
<p>Three community conversations – press release(s) promoting participation in the Albert Lea, Owatonna, and Winona community meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 28, 2015 – Kat Kountry 105FM “Where Will the Workers Come From?” <a href="http://katkountry105.com/where-will-the-workers-come-from/">http://katkountry105.com/where-will-the-workers-come-from/</a></li> <li>• November 12, 2015 – Owatonna People’s Press – “Regional Group Addresses Workforce Shortage in SE Minnesota” - <a href="http://www.southernminn.com/owatonna_peoples_press/news/article_841605c4-f95c-5da2-aa9f-a709f8801465.html">http://www.southernminn.com/owatonna_peoples_press/news/article_841605c4-f95c-5da2-aa9f-a709f8801465.html</a> (recap of the 2nd meeting in Owatonna, promotion of the third event in Winona)</li> <li>• November 29, 2015 – Winona Daily News – “Who Will Get the Job Done? SE MN Together to Host Dec. 3 conversation on Regional Workforce” <a href="http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/who-will-get-the-job-done-se-minnesota-together-to/article_a821479d-c44b-511e-9df2-fb8deaa834f7.html">http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/who-will-get-the-job-done-se-minnesota-together-to/article_a821479d-c44b-511e-9df2-fb8deaa834f7.html</a></li> </ul>
<p>Post-community meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• October 30, 2015 – Albert Lea Tribune – “Business leaders from southeast Minnesota gather to discuss workforce issues, solutions” – <a href="http://www.albertleatribune.com/2015/10/business-leaders-from-southeast-Minnesota-gather-to-discuss-workforce-issues-solutions/">http://www.albertleatribune.com/2015/10/business-leaders-from-southeast-Minnesota-gather-to-discuss-workforce-issues-solutions/</a></li> <li>• December 14, 2015 – LaCrosse Tribune – “7 Rivers Alliance to Spur Workforce Development with Grant Program” <a href="http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/rivers-alliance-to-spur-workforce-development-with-grant-program/article_e5f5fa82-4a0f-5fdc-9729-0643fd6e02e1.html">http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/rivers-alliance-to-spur-workforce-development-with-grant-program/article_e5f5fa82-4a0f-5fdc-9729-0643fd6e02e1.html</a></li> <li>• January 8, 2016 – Press Release – “Great ideas will begin to develop workforce strategies for action” – summarized three regional conversations and previewed February 25 planning meeting.</li> <li>• March 25, 2016 – Post Bulletin “SE MN Together addresses area’s workforce shortage” <a href="http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/se-mn-together-addresses-workforce-shortage/article_bccb4c2b-b76c-5672-8c63-86e1ab5509ec.html">http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/se-mn-together-addresses-workforce-shortage/article_bccb4c2b-b76c-5672-8c63-86e1ab5509ec.html</a></li> <li>• March 25, 2016 – Post Bulletin “With DMC Will Come Needs, Demands, Challenges” - <a href="http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/with-dmc-will-come-needs-demands-challenges/article_af494e6b-aec8-593c-b061-">http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/with-dmc-will-come-needs-demands-challenges/article_af494e6b-aec8-593c-b061-</a></li> </ul>

	<p>620a5034ce7f.html</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• April 6, 2016 – Twin Cities Business – “As Mayo’s DMC Project Moves Forward, SE MN Faces Worker, Housing Shortage.” <a href="http://tcbmag.com/News/Recent-News/2016/April/As-DMC-Project-Moves-Forward-SE-Minnesota-Faces-Workforce-Challenge/">http://tcbmag.com/News/Recent-News/2016/April/As-DMC-Project-Moves-Forward-SE-Minnesota-Faces-Workforce-Challenge/</a></li> <li>• April 13, 2015 – Post Bulletin – “Journey to Growth Updates Projects” - <a href="http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/journey-to-growth-updates-projects/article_35d25443-fef1-542a-be1a-0a3b2ef0c8e1.html">http://www.postbulletin.com/news/local/journey-to-growth-updates-projects/article_35d25443-fef1-542a-be1a-0a3b2ef0c8e1.html</a> (SE MN Together “Our Town” video project mentioned)</li> <li>• April 18, 2016 – Albert Lea Tribune – “Developing Solutions for the Workforce Challenge” - <a href="http://www.albertleatribune.com/2016/04/developing-solutions-for-the-workforce-challenge/http://www.albertleatribune.com/2016/04/developing-solutions-for-the-workforce-challenge/">http://www.albertleatribune.com/2016/04/developing-solutions-for-the-workforce-challenge/http://www.albertleatribune.com/2016/04/developing-solutions-for-the-workforce-challenge/</a> (guest column by Val Kvale focusing on SE MN Together and related workforce events coming up in the Albert Lea area in the near future)</li> </ul>
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