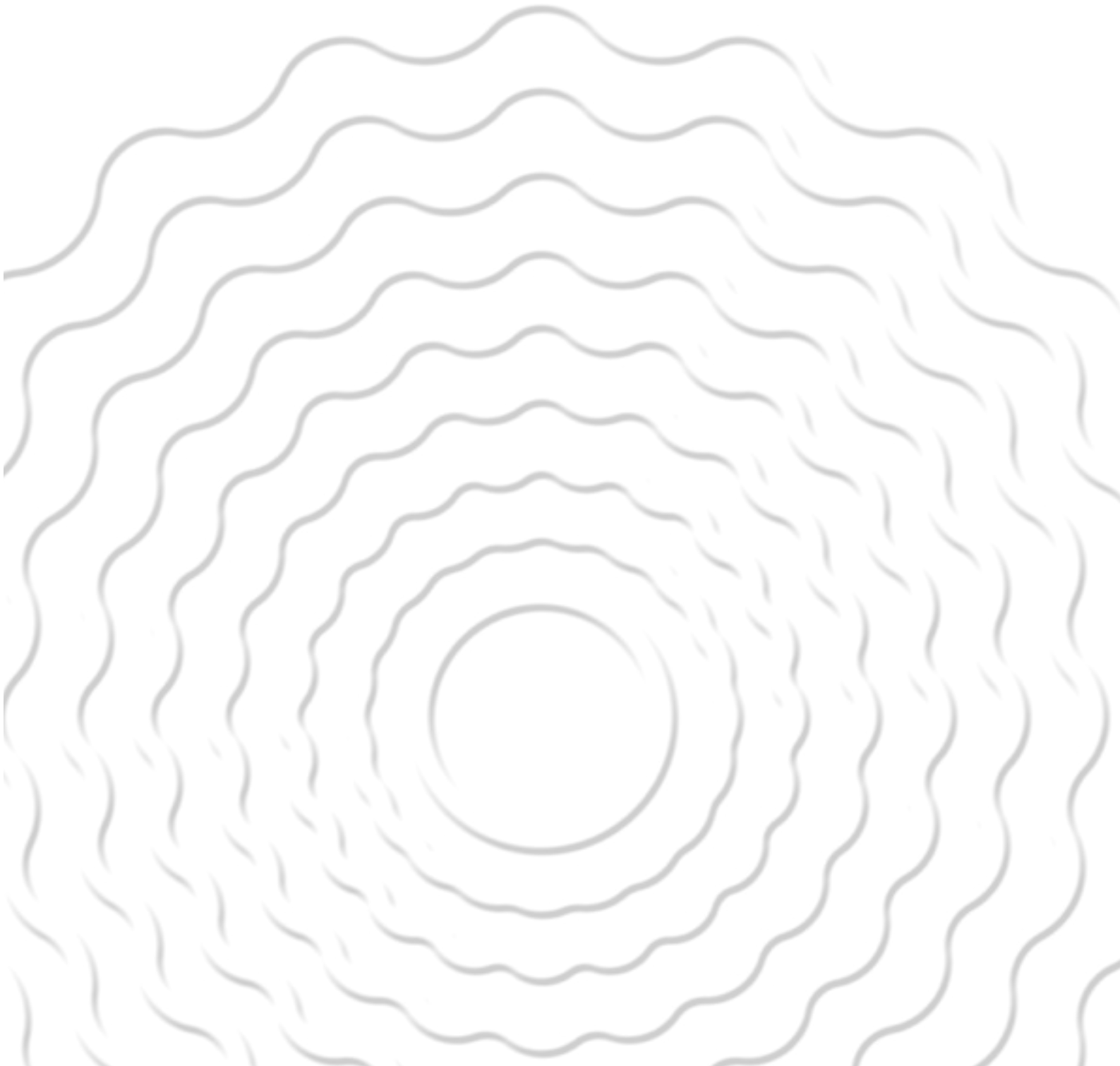




RIPPLES OF GOOD

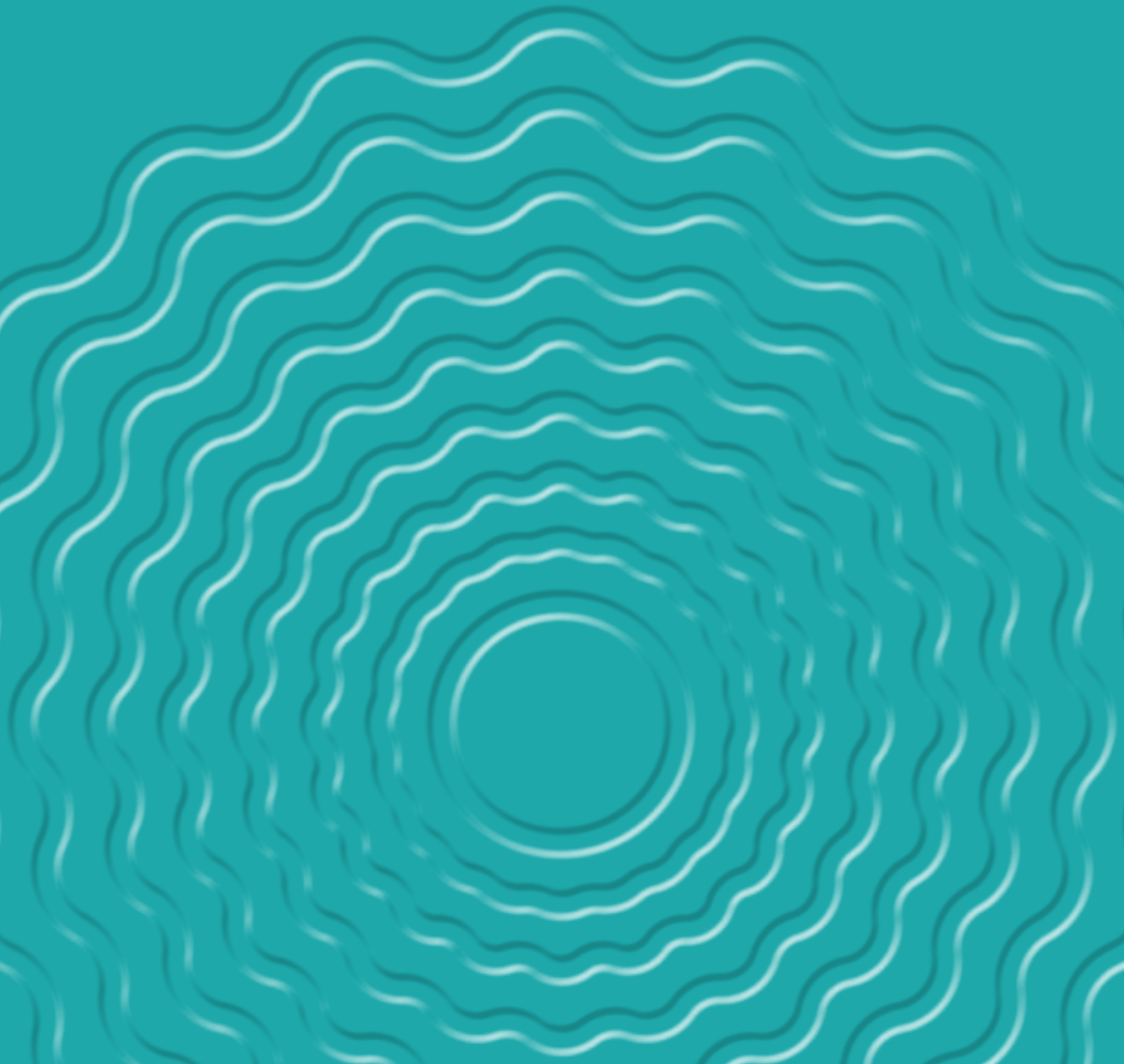
2023 ANNUAL REVIEW



“

One of the most important roles for our organization is to contribute to the quality of life in the region. We work to make sure that every individual who lives in west central Minnesota can rise to their highest potential. We promote a sense of interconnectedness and interdependency among and between the 82 towns, nine counties, and White Earth Nation.

We are the stewards of this region.



Dreaming big. **Planning big.**

Dear Friends and Partners,

As I reflect on the past year at West Central Initiative, I'm reminded of the power of community and the profound impact of collective action. Our journey through the year has been one of innovation, resolve, and deepened commitment to our mission of fostering economic vitality and enhancing the quality of life for all who call west central Minnesota home.

Our commitment to community, sustainability, and inclusivity has driven new initiatives across various sectors.

The Climate Action Plan, a milestone achievement, exemplifies our dedication to a future where our environment is protected for generations to come. This plan, a product of extensive community engagement, research, and collaboration, sets forth a pragmatic approach to addressing climate change with over 40 strategies and 273 actions across eight sectors.

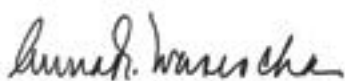
Equally important is our focus on nurturing leadership and civic participation through our new Rural Democracy program. This effort aims to strengthen rural democracy by empowering residents to meet leadership demands, eliminating barriers to political participation, and fostering an understanding of democratic processes.

Our commitment to rural belonging and inclusion has never been stronger. Through Welcoming Week and other community-led efforts, we've celebrated diversity, encouraged connections, and underscored the importance of creating welcoming communities for all. These efforts not only enhance the social fabric of our region but also contribute to its economic vitality.

Looking ahead, we're not just dreaming big—we're planning big. With the support of our stellar staff and board, incredible partners, and generous donors, we're on a mission to make west central Minnesota a beacon of community, opportunity, and vitality.

So, here's to another year of making magic happen, of turning challenges into opportunities, and of believing in the power of our community to do great things. Because when we work together, there's nothing we can't accomplish.

Sincerely,



Anna Wasescha | President



1 NO POVERTY

2 ZERO HUNGER

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

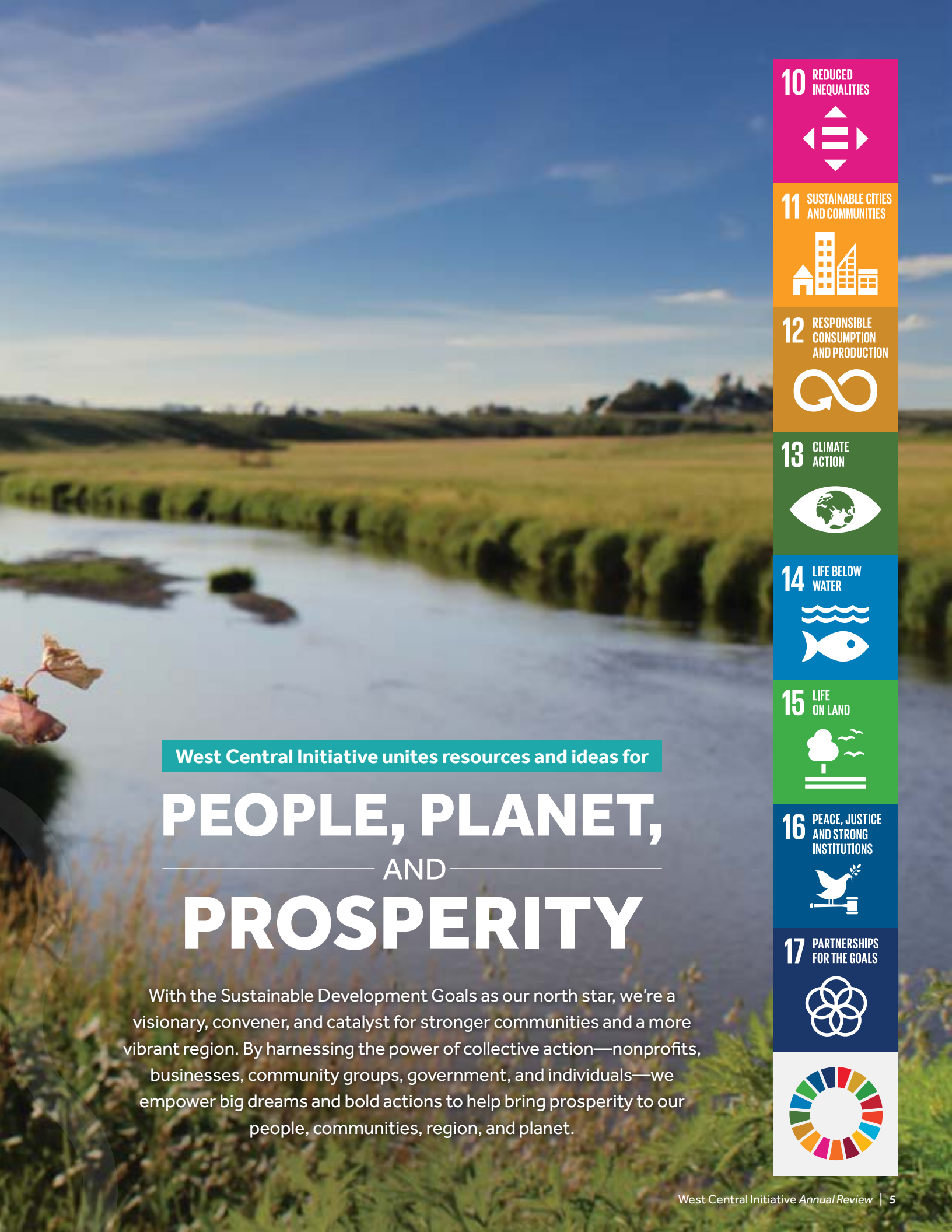
5 GENDER EQUALITY

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



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.

- 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES**
- 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES**
- 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION**
- 13 CLIMATE ACTION**
- 14 LIFE BELOW WATER**
- 15 LIFE ON LAND**
- 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**
- 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS**



FROM VISION TO ACTION:

Ambitious Goals with New Climate Action Plan



CLIMATE ACTION PLAN
Scan to read.

We envision a future where our one common asset, Earth, is protected for future generations.

In December 2023, the Region IV Economic Development District of Minnesota, comprised of elected officials, West Central Initiative board members, and EDA-required interest groups, approved the region's first Climate Action Plan.

The Climate Action Plan is a product of extensive research, consultation with experts, and engagement with the community to provide a holistic and pragmatic approach to addressing climate change. The plan includes 40 strategies and 273 actions across eight sectors over the course of eight years.

As the federally designated planning organization for the region, West Central Initiative was a primary driver and partner in developing this regional roadmap to address climate issues. At the heart of our strategic framework are our priorities of people, planet, and prosperity. As part of our work, we promote new strategies that increase environmental sustainability and resiliency, honor our unique geographic assets, and help to ensure our children have the natural environments they need to grow and thrive.

The next step is mobilization. For us, this means using many of the tools we've leveraged over the last 37 years—fundraising, granting, convening, and technical assistance—and trend-testing new ones. We're adding programs and creating new roles to integrate this work in our communities to address climate issues now and for future generations.



OUR FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE
Scan for a video on why we activate and align work around climate change.



Creating Your Climate Solutions

During our Earth Day gathering at the University of Minnesota Morris, we explored real solutions to tackle climate change in our backyard.

Dr. Heidi Roop, Director of the University of Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership and author of *The Climate Action Handbook: A Visual Guide to 100 Climate Solutions for Everyone*, presented a roadmap for creating a personalized climate solutions journey.



Rural Democracy

Increasing civic participation & supporting leadership development

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 almost half of our region as “leadership distressed.”

We aim to strengthen rural democracy by helping residents meet these demands through our Rural Democracy program.

“We strive to eliminate barriers to political participation and leadership,” said Rural Initiatives Strategist Celeste Koppe. “Through technical training and relationship building, we hold nonpartisan space for individuals to better understand and employ democratic processes to create healthier communities.”



ENGAGE IN DEMOCRACY

Scan for a video spotlighting our Rural Democracy program.



The **Rural Advocacy and Public Leadership Program** is our free six-month leadership and advocacy program for individuals interested in strengthening democracy and promoting good governance in their rural community. Participants engage in discussions, learning from each other, and develop a local “hands-on” project to address an issue in their community.



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. We invite all mayors in west central Minnesota to participate in our quarterly meetings.



Run4Rural is our free 1 ½ day public leadership training program designed for people interested in growing and strengthening their local communities through elected office and other forms of public leadership. This nonpartisan training is useful for existing and emerging rural leaders and people active in their community whether or not they have decided to run for office.

Fostering Leadership in West Central Minnesota

Aspiring community leaders explore the nature of politics during immersive Run4Rural weekend trainings.

In the fall of 2023, 26 dedicated individuals revisited the purpose of politics during the first cohort of our Run4Rural weekend trainings.

The program, designed for individuals interested in growing and strengthening their local communities through elected office and public leadership, brought together a diverse group of participants. Whether existing leaders, emerging talents, or community enthusiasts, everyone found value in this nonpartisan initiative, regardless of their decision to run for office.

Erik Peterson, President of Bending the Arc Strategies, and Ben Schierer, Mayor of Fergus Falls, facilitated the trainings. Peterson's extensive 20+ years of expertise, combined with Schierer's local engagement, created the ideal space, tools, and community for participants to explore how and when to run for local office.

The weekend sessions began by delving into participants' values and community connections, unraveling the "why" behind their aspirations in local politics. Motivators such as family, education, honesty, and community emerged as common threads among the participants.

Mayor Schierer, having a front-row seat to the diverse perspectives shared, remarked, "These folks have incredible passion and vision for their communities, showing immense commitment to being a part of their community's future through public service."

As the sessions progressed, each participant took the stage to deliver a stump speech—a politician's elevator pitch—receiving feedback from peers. This activity became a cohort favorite, allowing members to exchange personal stories and ideas, addressing challenges in housing, economic development, and education.

"On my drive here, I had no idea what I'd signed up for," voiced one community member. "Now I'm incredibly glad I came."

By the weekend's conclusion, both participants and leaders felt revitalized and connected. Erik Peterson reflected, "The best part is always the people. I looked around the room at the end of the training and saw a room full of leaders re-energized, more confident, and committed to doing the work together."





RURAL BELONGING

Uniting neighbors and building welcoming and inclusive places



RURAL BELONGING PROGRAM
Scan to view our impact.

Naima's Farm, Alexandria



— LIVE WIDE — OPEN

In an era where loneliness, disconnection, and distrust can feel overwhelming, **Live Wide Open** is on a mission to inspire a sense of belonging among all people in west central Minnesota through showcasing the fascinating and diverse people across our region. Join us to explore the power of human connection in our local communities.

In September 2023, more than 30 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 Week celebrations bring together neighbors of all backgrounds to build strong communities and affirm the importance of welcoming and inclusive places in achieving collective prosperity.

“Welcoming Week gives communities a chance to reflect on their interactions with newcomers,” said Corporate Generosity Liaison Rick Schara. “I love how local conversations have led to regional connections. So the benefits go way beyond the event itself.”

West Central Initiative offered sponsorships to local hosts organizing events.

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.





TWO FELLOWS, ONE COMMUNITY

Endless Ripples of Good

In the small yet vibrant community of Pelican Rapids, two remarkable women, Staci Allmaras and Dawn Finn, have embarked on distinct journeys with a shared purpose: fostering inclusion and belonging. With additional resources provided by the Initiators Fellowship, they envision a river of positive change flowing through their community. "I recognize this unique opportunity," Staci shared. "Two Fellows in the same community, each with programs working on building a bridge of belonging. That's the bigger picture."



MEET STACI

Staci, an education veteran with more than 20 years of experience, initiated her journey a few years ago by bringing youth together and listening to their experiences. "What they're looking for and what they want is belonging and inclusion," she said. "They want their voices in decision-making spaces."

Recognizing this longing, she founded The Youths_PR, an organization dedicated to creating communal spaces and generating income opportunities for youth. "It's an investment in our young people and

how communities can come together to support inclusion and belonging," Staci said. She believes that the responsibility doesn't solely lie with schools; instead, the entire community plays a vital role in fostering an environment where young voices are heard and valued. "My hope is that we, in communities, are choosing inclusion. It's our choice," Staci said. "Yes, we're going to celebrate the diversity, but we're *choosing* inclusion and we're doing that amongst groups within our community."



MEET DAWN

Drawing on extensive experience in social work and three decades of sobriety, Dawn embarked on her journey of belonging from a different angle. "What I watched in my field as a social worker is that there really wasn't a place for people to belong," Dawn said.

She personally felt the absence of belonging when she moved to Pelican Rapids, recognizing a significant portion of the population feeling overlooked. She questioned, "How do we share these stories and help individuals feel embraced by their community?"

In response, Dawn was the moving force behind Community & Life Services, a nonprofit dedicated to mental health services. Dawn focuses on breaking barriers and creating long-term positive change for residents in Otter Tail and Becker Counties. She aims to equip parents with the tools to navigate life's challenges and create a supportive community. "I believe that everybody deserves an opportunity to have health and wellness. And recovery is the cornerstone for building wellness because, without recovery of any kind, you cannot become the person that you want to become."

Dawn's mission centers on supporting individuals to uphold their dignity, express their unique voices, address root causes of challenges, and still experience a sense of belonging.

THE INITIATORS FELLOWSHIP

Based on their work and vision, both Staci and Dawn were selected for the 2024-2025 Initiators Fellowship, a program supporting entrepreneurs in Greater Minnesota addressing social and environmental challenges. This fellowship, with a cohort of nine fellows from diverse backgrounds, provides comprehensive programming, executive mentoring, leadership training, and a \$30,000 annual stipend for each fellow.

West Central Initiative proudly sponsors Staci and Dawn as outstanding fellows in the Initiators Fellowship. Staci is dedicated to expanding The Youths_PR, while Dawn is committed to mental health services through Community & Life Services.

The Initiators Fellowship, a collaborative effort of the Initiative Foundation, Northwest Minnesota Foundation, Southwest Initiative Foundation, and West Central Initiative, is made possible by generous funders, including Granite Partners, Bush Foundation, McKnight

Foundation, and Sourcewell.

Staci applied for the Initiators Fellowship to gain business support and amplify the impact of her work. "It's a bigger drip," she explained. She sees small actions around inclusivity and belonging leading to significant positive effects that flow through communities, impacting young people and adults alike. Staci is already seeing momentum build through a community group proposal for the Bridge Center, where they hope to bring people together bridging generations, cultures, and community groups.

Dawn's motivation for applying to the fellowship stems from the realization that together, they form a community. "Really it's a team because we're a community. We work to give people back their power," Dawn said. "You can't truly empower somebody. You cannot. What you can do is give them their power back. I think our mission isn't just the ripple, but it's that drop that goes into creating that ripple."

In Pelican Rapids, two Initiators Fellows are showing that when united, a community can choose inclusion, build bridges of belonging, and help individuals create their own ripples of good.



The Initiators Fellowship is a bold strategy that gives next-generation leaders the tools and resources to accelerate their entrepreneurial and leadership skills. This two-year program helps build business and leadership capacity for the greater good of Greater Minnesota.



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 Loan Program

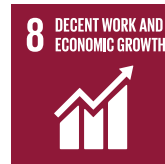
Start-ups and businesses looking to expand can tap into West Central Initiative's loan program when they have difficulty accessing bank financing. As a "gap lender," we can supplement or complement conventional or bank financing to help the financing package succeed.

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 support.
- Community engagement and facilitation.



▶ **Contact Greg Wagner, AICP,** Director of Business & Economic Development, at greg@wcif.org to learn more.



Battle Lake's Boyum Admits She's a Serial Entrepreneur. And the Town is Better for It!

Sara Boyum loves her home town of Battle Lake. After graduating from high school, she went off to college, knowing one day she would return.

And lucky for Battle Lake, she did! Simply put, the downtown might look totally different today if not for Sara's drive to open businesses.

If not for Sara, Stella's Restaurant wouldn't be serving great food, and The Rusty Nail wouldn't have its delicious burgers. Neverwinter Clothing wouldn't exist, and Neverbetter Market and Wellness wouldn't have opened in 2023. No doubt, these are important assets for the Battle Lake vibe.

So Sara, have you ever been called a serial entrepreneur? "Yes, more than once," she laughs.

Where did this passion for business come from?

When Sara was nine years old, her family lived in Moorhead. She remembers grabbing her 7-year-old sister to ride the bus to the Moorhead library. Sara wasn't looking to find the children's section; she wanted to look at business plan books. Back then, Sara even wrote letters to her mother asking to rent the garage for a business venture. Her mother still has them.

Her obsession with business building started young. Now it didn't come from family role models. Her mother was a nurse and her father worked for the railroad. "It must be inborn," she laughs. "I've been doing this (building businesses) as long as I can remember," she says.

Sara always wanted a restaurant and that dream came true with Stella's opening in 2007. Some years earlier, she moved back home from Minneapolis. But she didn't find many "cool places to drink wine and sit on the patio or have food besides a cheeseburger and fries."

"I knew there was something missing, and I knew I can't be the only one who wants something more to experience because we live in a tourist community" with people visiting from bigger cities.

After Stella's, the Old Brick Inn tavern became available, and Sara again invested in remodeling and making The Rusty Nail a place where everybody knows your name.



At that point, she took stock. "The restaurant scene here was hoppin'," she said, "but the shopping scene was stale. So I was, like, well, I'm gonna open a store."

She opened Neverwinter, a clothing and gift shop, next to The Rusty Nail. She found a market for custom t-shirts and opened a sister store in Walker, Minn.

Then in 2022, she purchased an old second-hand shop. And with the help of West Central Initiative's loan program, Neverbetter opened for business in July 2023. Neverbetter features fresh salads and grain bowls, smoothies, gifts, a selection of foods not found in the area, a fitness studio with a sauna, massages, and more.

What advice does Sara offer for today's entrepreneurs? "Location to me is number one," she says. "And beyond location, it's what fits where you are at. What can your community handle or sustain? If this wasn't a tourist town, I wouldn't do some of the things I did."

And there is risk. "I lot of people don't like to risk anything, but I'm obviously a risk taker. It's a big risk to do a lot of stuff, it's a lot of money, but I never think to myself, oh geez, what if it doesn't work. Never ever." Confidence, she adds, comes from planning.

Were these succession businesses in a plan for Sara? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Her serial entrepreneurship is here to stay!



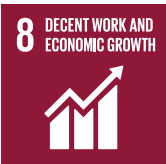
We want children to have the best possible start toward a healthy life of learning, achieving, and succeeding. **Community organization is key.**

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.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

How Glenwood, Minnesota, is Working to Solve Its Child Care Crisis

Pope County—like counties across the nation—has a child-care shortage. In early 2023, that shortage was expected to deepen when a church in Glenwood announced that it would again need the space that it was renting to Kingdom Kids, an organization licensed to provide child care for up to 96 kids. With the impending closure of Kingdom Kids and the potentially devastating impact on its economy, the Glenwood community rallied to identify a solution. And, soon after, the Child Care Task Force was officially launched.



One of the marvelous things about community is when they come together and step up to the plate to create solutions...It has been a privilege to be a part of it.

— Tammy Anderson

Pope County Child Care Project Manager

Tammy Anderson was appointed as the Pope County Child Care Project Manager and has been engaging with task force members, government and business stakeholders, and community members to address child care access in the region. “One of the marvelous things about community is when they come together and step up to the plate to create solutions,” said Anderson. “It has been a privilege to be a part of it.”

Recognizing the importance of both short-term solutions and long-term planning, the church extended the lease to Kingdom Kids, now known as Lakes Area Enrichment Center (LAEC), for another year. That will provide time for the community to make its dream a reality: a new space for LAEC.

Project managers are working with the school district to potentially use some of its space and land for a new facility. Although the space is large enough to house LAEC’s current enrollment, the community will need to continue searching for additional care settings.

The task force has a holistic approach, considering licensed family child care and legally unlicensed Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care as vital components

of child care. LAEC aims to become a hub for training, resources, and community space for meetings, emphasizing the importance of supporting and retaining existing early care and education providers. The task force has also hired a consultant to write grants and stay focused on their objectives.

“Though each of the task force members is governed by their own entity, together we’re able to look at the broader picture of what each can offer,” said Jeannie Pederson, Pope County Early Childhood/THRIVE Initiative Coordinator. “Knowing what each partner is doing and finding ways to enhance child care access across Pope County is the goal and a true sign of collaboration.”

West Central Initiative played a crucial role in supporting Pope County’s Child Care Task Force. Team members provided valuable information on child development, child care, grant opportunities, and legislation. Additionally, West Central Initiative offered grants totaling \$15,000 to assist Glenwood in implementing the task force and finding a tailored child care solution for their community.

Three of our team members participated in the Pope County Child Care Task Force: Director of Early Childhood Nancy Jost, Early Childhood Specialist Marsha Erickson, and Director of Business and Economic Development Greg Wagner. West Central Initiative Board Member Trina Starker contributed to the efforts, serving as liaison between the Pope County Child Care Task Force and Senator Klobuchar’s Office.

“Pope County will be successful because they’re working together to help children, families, and the community thrive,” said Nancy Jost.



Rolling Into Fun: Fergus Falls Unveils Region's First Bicycle Playground



The City of Fergus Falls partnered with Pedal Fergus Falls to create the region's first bicycle playground on the tennis court at T.H. Johnson Athletic Park. The playground helps bridge the gap in bicycle education by providing a safe, public, accessible location for parents to take their kids to learn how to ride their bikes in a fun and interactive way.

Funding from the Inga M. Johnson Endowment Fund helped make the bicycle playground possible, and the dedicated efforts of our Transportation Planning Team and community volunteers brought the installation to life. Be sure to explore this exciting addition to the community!

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.

Community input sparks solutions for **Safe Routes to School Plans**

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 2023, our Director of Transportation Planning Wayne Hurley, Transportation Planner Mallory Jarvi, and

Minnesota GreenCorps Member Aaliyah Helland finalized the Pelican Rapids Safe Routes to School Plan.

Wayne, Mallory, and Aaliyah also began working on Safe Routes to School Plans in Alexandria, Osakis, and White Earth Nation. In September and October, they hosted kick-off meetings and conducted on-site observation days. These communities each have their own unique histories and cultures that will shape the goals and visions of their respective plans. We expect to finalize these Safe Routes to School Plans in the spring of 2024.





A vibrant and sustainable local food system supports local farmers, promotes consumption of fresh foods, and fosters resilient communities and economies.

To help create a thriving and interconnected food ecosystem, we support regenerative agriculture practices, connect farmers with consumers, facilitate educational opportunities, and advocate for policies that support local food production.

West Central Minnesota Regional Food System Plan

Collaborating with PartnerSHIP 4 Health and Clay, Becker, Otter Tail, and Wilkin Counties, we contributed grant funding to develop a regional food systems plan.

“A common theme we found when working with local food advocates was that people were working in silos to advance local food efforts,” said Jason Bergstrand, PartnerSHIP 4 Health Manager. “By creating the regional food systems plan, one hope was to rally stakeholders around a unified plan that communities could use to strengthen local food systems while making food more equitable.”

This five-year plan brings structure and strategy to local food systems growth and helps align policies to support the local food system.



Conversation about Climate and Rural Community Resiliency

In October, we co-hosted a community event that focused on the impact of climate change on farming and farmers' mental health.

Speakers included Ariel Kagan, Minnesota Farmers Union's Climate and Working Lands Program Director; Monica McConkey, a Rural Mental Health Specialist with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture; and Anna Wasescha, President of West Central Initiative.

The event concluded with small group discussions to address community concerns.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES: Powered by Collective Giving

As a community foundation, one of our roles is to establish and manage dedicated 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: making grants for charitable activities within the fund’s specific purpose and providing rural economic development loans through a revolving loan fund. These funds generate interest, which can be distributed as grants or reinvested in the fund.

Component fund activities are directed by groups of community volunteers called advisory committees. Partnerships among the advisory committees, donors, and West Central Initiative play a critical role in the success of these funds and the achievement of their goals.

Through these funds, we 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.

Q&A with the Glacial Hills Elementary School Community Fund

How is your group focused on bettering your community?

We embrace project-based learning, student-centered instruction, and learning outside the classroom. Our goal is to develop students into life-long, passionate learners who are invested in their own education and their community. We aren’t hesitant to embrace unconventional methods to reimagine and revolutionize education to do so!

What projects will the Glacial Hills Elementary School Fund support?

We’re excited to break our fund into three categories: capital funds, experiential learning donations, and scholarships. This allows our donors to choose how they wish to support our school.

What are you most excited about?

The project we’re most excited about is our outdoor learning center called the Eagles Nest. Our school received grants and community donations to transform the two acres behind the school to build

an outdoor learning center and restore, maintain, and improve the health of the ecosystems of central Minnesota to include a rain and butterfly garden along with natural prairie grasses. This project will be designed and built by our 3rd through 6th grade students alongside community partners.

How has the partnership with West Central Initiative helped your cause?

The staff are friendly, local, supportive, and attentive to our needs. It’s amazing to connect with an organization that’s passionate about the same things we are!





RIPPLES OF GOOD

Generosity Grows from a Love for Libraries

To Lynn Middleton-Koller, the old Fergus Falls Public Library on North Union Avenue was more than bricks and shelves of books. It was a magical world that shaped her childhood—a treasure house of stories that inspired her curiosity and opened her to many ways of thinking and living.

"When I was growing up, the most important thing to me in the world was the public library," Lynn reminisces. "I was a devoted reader, my whole family was, so I was never without a book. I spent a lot of time at the library and was able to read unrestrictedly—whatever I found I could read. It opened me up to lots of possibilities."

Lynn's love of learning continued as she ventured away to college, inspired by high school teachers Ursel Eggen and Eugene Eckhoff to earn degrees in French and English. Shortly after graduating, Lynn married and built a life in St. Paul. Trips back for the annual Art of the Lakes Studio Tour and visits to her family cabin in Otter Tail County kept

her connected to the area, but it was a call from her childhood that drew Lynn back to Fergus Falls.

The public library, a cornerstone of her formative years (though now in a different location), needed a major remodel and expansion. Lynn's love for the library compelled her to support the project from nearly 200 miles away.

The Fergus Falls Public Library underwent a massive makeover and reopened its doors to the public in January 2019. Lynn, along with other generous donors, contributed to the Fergus Falls Public Library Foundation managed by West Central Initiative, making this project possible.

For several years, Lynn made contributions to the Library Fund without knowing much about West Central Initiative. One day, curiosity drove her to learn more. She discovered established funds tied to individuals from her past, like the one created by Virginia (Ginny) and Samuel Adams, who attended the same church as her family. Lynn also found alignment between West Central Initiative's work and her interests and values. "I want to be thoughtful about what I support," Lynn said. "I've developed a deep interest in land stewardship and climate change and the value of diversity. It's all interconnected to me."

Curiosity piqued, Lynn connected with Rebecca Lynn Petersen, West Central Initiative's Director of Development, who helped her explore the possibilities of giving through an organization like West Central Initiative. Lynn embraced the concept of a donor advised fund, directing payouts to causes close to her heart, such as libraries, the arts, farmland access, sustainable agriculture, and equity.

She also appreciated the platforms that West Central Initiative provides, especially the Heartland Giving Farmland Stewardship Program, allowing her to channel her philanthropy with purpose. "In my retirement, it's become fun as well," Lynn explained. "I'm learning about creative ways to give—both now and in my estate plan."

Lynn's giving extends beyond immediate needs. She aspires to support initiatives that contribute to resilient and welcoming communities.

When asked about her decision to reinvest in west central Minnesota, Lynn spoke passionately about bridging the rural-urban divide. "I'm from a small town, but now I'm from the city, too, and I feel like that separation needs healing. It needs us to flow back and forth, needs us to know one another," she said. "Fergus is where I grew up and it's the area I know. I have similar feelings about eastern North Dakota, which was home to me also.

I will do some of my giving there, and I'll do some of some giving here in the urban area because there are many, many needs here as well. It's sort of like a bringing together. I guess. One person's attempt," she mused.

“
I want to be thoughtful about what I support...I've developed a deep interest in land stewardship and climate change and the value of diversity. It's all interconnected to me.
”

In Lynn's eyes, the beauty lies in interconnectedness. "A ripple that starts in a small place can reach out and affect places far, far away," she shared.

As Lynn continues to write her story of generosity, ripples of good extend far beyond the walls of a beloved library, leaving a lasting mark on the communities close to her heart.

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.



► **Contact Rebecca Petersen**, Director of Development, at **800-735-2239** or **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.

- Dana Anderson
- Mark Asleson
- Mitch and Jackie Buboltz
- Andrew and Sarah Casey
- John and Judi Dahlseng
- Nancy and Dr. Lowell Einerson
- Donna and Jeff Ellsworth
- Jill Fox
- Thomas Frank
- Amy Freund and Katherine Mudge
- Katie and Nick Ganoë
- Craig and Gwen Perman Gillespie
- David and Deborah Hegseth
- Wayne and Tammy Hurley
- Daniel and Pamela Langseth
- Steve Lindaas
- Jim and Jennie MacFarlane
- John MacFarlane
- Elena Machkasova
- Catherine McGinnis
- Stephen Nagle
- Carl Newbanks
- Rebecca Petersen and Mark A. Solie
- Elizabeth Pihlaja
- Ashley Quam
- Teresa Rasmussen and Jon Trangsrud
- Betsy Roder
- Richard and Kathleen "Kitt" Schara
- Laura Busian Schmidt and Joel Schmidt
- Steve and Shelley Schoeneck
- Valaurie and Greg Trumm
- Dianne Tuff
- Lisa Turner
- Samantha VanWechel-Meyer
- Kelsey Varty
- Camille Pearson Walz
- Anna M. Wasescha and Richard Kagan
- Heather Weber
- Grace Wright
- AmazonSmile Foundation
- Cletus M. Bitzan Trust
- Granite Partners Foundation of Minnesota, Inc.
- Kenterprises Consulting LLC
- Koshnick Jr. Family Fund
- Maplelag, Inc.
- McKnight Foundation
- Middleton-Koller Fund
- Minneapolis Foundation
- Park Region Telephone
- Quality Toyota
- Rick and Helga Bauerly Foundation
- Toyota Motor Sales, USA, Inc.
- City of Barnesville
- City of Battle Lake
- City of Breckenridge
- City of Browns Valley
- City of Chokio
- City of Dent
- City of Fergus Falls
- City of Hawley
- City of Herman
- City of Kensington
- City of Lowry
- City of Moorhead
- City of Morris
- City of Ottertail
- City of Parkers Prairie
- City of Pelican Rapids
- City of Perham
- City of Richville
- City of Rothsay
- City of Villard
- City of Westport
- City of Wheaton
- Becker County
- Clay County
- Douglas County
- Grant County
- Otter Tail County
- Pope County
- Stevens County
- Traverse County
- Wilkin County

2023

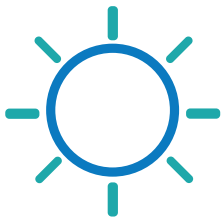
BY THE NUMBERS

26 
residents participated in the Run4Rural program



\$1.5
MILLION
in loans distributed

\$11.08
MILLION
leveraged to
serve our region



273

Climate Action Plan
actions identified



30+

Welcoming Week
events sponsored in west
central Minnesota



18

new
component funds



860+

students benefited from the new
Pelican Rapids Safe Routes to School Plan
developed by our team

2023 AT A GLANCE

\$88.9M TOTAL ASSETS

\$3.89M TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS

538 GRANTS AWARDED

\$1.56M GRANTED FROM WEST CENTRAL INITIATIVE

\$2.94M GRANTED FROM COMPONENT FUNDS

\$112K GRANTED FROM PERSONALLY ENDOWED LEGACY FUNDS

GRANTS



\$147,000

Building a **Sustainable** Region



\$142,000

Building an **Equitable** Region



\$115,500 Early Childhood



\$21,000 Emergency Preparedness



\$188,000 Project Support



\$944,000

MN Department of Employment and Economic Development
Main Street Revitalization

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 Oral Health Education Outreach Clinics

Becker County Public Health

for Oral Health Access, Education, and Outreach

Children's Dental Services

for Early Childhood Dental Network

Clay County Social Services

for Clay County Early Childhood Initiative

Life Connections

for Early Childhood Dental Network

MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc.

for Becker County Early Childhood Initiative, Early Childhood Dental Network, and Becker County Child Care Project Manager

Otter Cove Children's Museum LLC

for Early Childhood Dental Network

Otter Tail County

for Otter Tail County Child Care Project Manager

Southern Valley Early Childhood Initiative Coalition

for Southern Valley Early Childhood Initiative and Early Childhood Dental Network

Stevens County Human Services

for Stevens County Early Childhood Initiative and Early Childhood Dental Network

Traverse County Social Services

for Traverse County Early Childhood Initiative and Early Childhood Dental Network

United Way of Douglas and Pope Counties

for Douglas County Early Childhood Initiative and Early Childhood Dental Network

United Way of Otter Tail & Wadena Counties

for Early Childhood Dental Network

West Central Area School District

for Grant County Early Childhood Network

Western Prairie Human Services – Grant County

for Early Childhood Dental Network

Western Prairie Human Services – Pope County

for Early Childhood Thrive Initiative and Child Care Project Manager

White Earth Tribal Council

for Early Childhood Dental Network

Emergency Preparedness

City of Ashby

for Fire Department Support

City of Audubon

for Fire Department Support

City of Barrett

for Fire Department Support

City of Brandon

for Fire Department Support

City of Browns Valley

for Fire Department Support

City of Carlos

for Fire Department Support

City of Chokio

for Fire Department Support

City of Cyrus

for Fire Department Support

City of Deer Creek

for Fire Department Support

City of Donnelly

for Fire Department Support

City of Garfield

for Fire Department Support

City of Herman

for Fire Department Support

City of Kensington

for Fire Department Support

City of Lowry

for Fire Department Support

City of Miltona

for Fire Department Support

City of Rothsay

for Fire Department Support

City of Ulen

for Fire Department Support

City of Underwood

for Fire Department Support

City of Vergas

for Fire Department Support

City of Villard

for Fire Department Support

Leaf Valley Township

for Fire Department Support

Thank you to The Funders Network's Community Foundation Disaster Response Fund for providing us with grant dollars to distribute in our region.

Resilient Communities: Building an Equitable Region

Bagosendaan
for Youth Activities

Bam'idizowigamig Creator's Place
for the Workforce Program

The Bridge Community Pantry
for Culturally Specific Food Bags

Browns Valley School District
for Tier 2 Mental Health Programming

Conexiones
for Operating Support

Cultural Diversity Resources
for Added Capacity to Support New Americans and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Nonprofits and Leaders

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
for the Northwest Immigration Project

Inclusive Moorhead
for Inclusive Moorhead Implementation

Pelican Rapids Multicultural Committee
for the Pelican Rapids International Friendship Festival

Regional Native Public Defense Corporation
for Expanding Holistic Defense in White Earth Nation

Someplace Safe
for Agency-Wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

YMCA of Cass and Clay Counties
for Comfort & Confidence Swim Class

Resilient Communities: Building a Sustainable Region

City of Moorhead Parks & Recreation
for Get Fresh & Go Local

City of Morris
for a Five-Year Update to the Morris Strategic Plan

Clay County Public Health – PartnerSHIP 4 Health
for the Regional Food Council

Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Elementary
for the School Pollinator Garden

Doubting Thomas Farms
for Meet Me at the Farm

Ecumen Bethel Manor and Winona Shores Apartments
for Restoration and Nature Trail Creation

First Congregational UCC Moorhead
for the Youth Stewards Food & Ecology Initiative

Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center
for Climate-Wise Prairie Learning

Glacial Hills Elementary
for the Outdoor Learning Center

Henning Public School
for the Climate Action Library

Otter Tail County Solid Waste
to Expand Access to the Organics Recycling Program

PRAIRIE as Fiscal Sponsor of the New Roots Farm Incubator Cooperative
for the New Roots Farm Incubator Cooperative

Springboard for the Arts
for the Mobile Version of Sustainability Studios

Tyler Shipman Memorial Car Show
for the Community Service Shed Donation

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Main Street Revitalization

Ben's Service LLC (Browns Valley)
for Main Street Revitalization

BW, Incorporated (Browns Valley)
for Main Street Revitalization

Family Strong LLC (Browns Valley)
for Main Street Revitalization

John's Total Entertainment (Morris)
for Main Street Revitalization

Purpose LLC (Morris)
for Main Street Revitalization

The Hudson Inn LLC (Morris)
for Main Street Revitalization

Project Support

City of Fergus Falls
for the Splash Pad

The Gifted Learning Project
to Support Doubting Thomas Farms and The Gifted Learning Project

Hornets Hive
for CornerStone Capital Campaign

Richland Wilkin Food Pantry
for Wilkin County Food Needs

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Welcome new board members



Nancy Huot
Stevens County



Jacob McArthur
White Earth Nation



Shelly Staebler
Traverse County



Trina Starker
Pope County



Janice Tweet
Clay County

Board members continuing to serve

Jackie Buboltz
Becker County

Corey Kratcha
Wilkin County

Elizabeth Pihlaja
Otter Tail County

David Schornack
Otter Tail County

Nicole Fernholz
Douglas County

Kari Kreft
Grant County

Laura J. Busian Schmidt
Stevens County

Tyler Wirth
Douglas County

Yoke-Sim Gunaratne
Clay County

Eric Newell
Clay County

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT BOARD

Scott Allen
City of Alexandria

Paul Krabbenhoft
Clay County

Chad Metz
Traverse County

Dwight Walvatne
Grant County

Jackie Buboltz
City of Detroit Lakes

Patricia Lesmeister-Nelson
Stevens County

Kurt Mortenson
Otter Tail County

Deb White
City of Moorhead

Rick Busko
Wilkin County

Neil Madison
City of Browns Valley

Tom Rufer
City of Fergus Falls

Paul Wildman
Pope County

Tim Kalina
Douglas County

Jacob McArthur
White Earth Nation

Richard Vareberg
Becker County

Kevin Wohlers
City of Morris



GATHERING TO EDUCATE, ACTIVATE, AND CELEBRATE

We continue to hold events throughout our region, gathering with new and old friends to build connections and collaborate on meaningful projects that uplift our communities. Check out our events calendar at wcif.org/events to find out when we'll be in your area!

STAFF

Jill Amundson
Impact Evaluator

Sarah Casey
Director of Strategic Communications

Marsha Erickson
Early Childhood Specialist

Deb Hegseth
Loan Specialist

Wayne T. Hurley
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
Marketing & Communications Specialist

Deb Raasch
Accountant

Rick Schara
Corporate Generosity Liaison

Lisa Turner
Executive Assistant to the President

Samantha VanWechel-Meyer
Community Philanthropy Officer

Greg Wagner
Director of Business & Economic Development

Anna Wasescha
President

Heather Weber
Salesforce Administrator

Welcome new team members



Dana Anderson
Communications Officer



Aaliyah Helland
Minnesota GreenCorps Member



Philip Hintz
Loan Officer



Brogan Ludwig
American Connection Corp Member



Amanda Quam
Grants Officer



April Rog
Climate Officer



Cedar Walters
Climate Officer



Camille Pearson Walz
Development Officer



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.



UNLOCK THE STORY

Scan for an exclusive video on
West Central Initiative's ripples of good.



1000 Western Avenue | P.O. Box 318 | Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0318 | wcif.org

Call (800) 735-2239 to schedule a meeting to learn more.