

CONAC REAP Zone Annual Report 2002

Executive Summary:

The CONAC REAP Zone was very involved in several activities over the past year. The Zone completed an Information Technology strategic plan. This plan identified potential IT strategies to pursue and possible project to complete. The Zone also updated its regular strategic plan and combined the similar activities that were identified in the IT strategic plan where they fit. CONAC had community participation from each county during its IT and regular strategic planning processes.

CONAC did complete some Information Technology projects during the year. They completed a video conferencing system to link-up several rural school districts to provide instructional classes. They funded a Rural Technology and Business Center in Rugby, ND that will assist Zone residents with their business informational needs. The Zone involved many different partnering sources when completing these projects.

CONAC's main partnership is with the REAP Investment Board. This Board is the fiscal agent for the Zone and assists the Zone with managing its funds. CONAC also is a member of the Champion REAP Alliance, which is a connecting point to all the other empowerment communities in the State. The Alliance relationship will assist CONAC greatly in getting a web site to help market the Zone. These two key partnerships are the foundation for development with in the CONAC REAP Zone.

CONAC is looking to the future in implementing the many activities identified in their strategic plans. CONAC has recently benchmarked an internet based business assistance package, which will help entrepreneurs and existing businesses with their development needs. CONAC realizes that a project of this magnitude will take a vast amount of resources and plans to obtain partners when ever possible.

Most Significant Accomplishment:

The CONAC REAP Zone completed several important projects last year. CONAC used funding from a HUD-EDI grant as leverage for most of the completed projects. Some of the highlights for the year were: Development of the Web Portal for members of the Champion REAP Alliance. This web base information system allows member communities to have web sites, which can be used to entice community development efforts. CONAC also invested in a Rural Technology and Business Center located in Rugby, ND, which will assist rural people with their business development needs. CONAC also developed an Information Technology strategic plan to assist the entire with its IT needs. CONAC also was instrumental in linking 19 school districts with video conferencing capability.

Community Participation:

CONAC covers six north central counties in North Dakota. These six counties are all represented on the CONAC REAP Zone board. These Counties also had input in the development of the Zone's Strategic and Information Technology Strategic plans. Interviews of citizens and businesses throughout the Zone were conducted in order to have an understanding of the needs and future direction of IT deployment.

Partnerships and Alliances:

CONAC has been pursuing alliances and partnerships during the year. CONAC is a member of the Champion/REAP Alliance and a partner in the REAP Investment Board. CONAC has formed a partnership with all the local development entities in the Zone to be a joint contributor and developer of many projects. CONAC attempts to work with State agencies and private companies when ever possible to foster growth in the Zone.

Problems/Obstacles:

CONAC has looked at the tourism issue in the Zone. CONAC realizes the need is there, but is having difficulty determining a direction on how to support it. Some members think that giving funding to little tourism projects should be the direction. Others think building the capacity for those little projects for find other sources of funding should be the direction. This dilemma has slowed the process of determining a direction for CONAC regarding the support for the tourism issue.

Solutions:

The key solution to the dilemma of the tourism issue is keeping the communication open and work together as a team to develop or find a model of support for tourism activities. CONAC has established a committee for tourism. This committee has the daunting task of researching all possible tourism models to follow and give their recommendation to the CONAC board.

Best Practices:

CONAC realizes that partnering with other entities assists greatly in completing projects. Also using smaller committees to research and address large issues has worked the best for getting those issues resolved. CONAC has also established specific guidelines for funding projects, which allows them to target funds where they are needed most.

Plans/Prospects for the Future:

CONAC has established where it wants to focus its resources for the next year. They have received HUD-EDI funds to be used for leveraging with other financial resources. These resources will be dedicated for implementing the elements in the recently revised strategic plan. Some of the major projects scheduled for this year include: Completing CONAC's section of the Alliance web site. Incorporating a web based business resource tool called Bizpathway. This resource tool will provide local entrepreneur, and business people to access online business information to assist them with their business development. Also, CONAC will be pursuing a list of activities

listed in its Information Technology strategic plan.