



Implementation strategies, preliminary budgets and benchmarks for the CONAC REAP Zone Information Technology Plan were prioritized and developed on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002 following a CONAC REAP Board meeting held at the Maddock Technology Center. Goals and strategies were categorized and ranked based on need, momentum, opportunity and potential impact in the region.

□ **Young people retention and attraction strategies (36)**

Concerted efforts to attract, and retain, youth and young adults are key to developing a successful future for the CONAC REAP Zone and region. Youth retention efforts should focus on:

- Tracking high school graduates
- Organizing youth summits/showcase
- Asking youth what they want
- Creating incentives for youth/young adults to start businesses

These efforts will culminate in the development of 3 youth leadership summits, tech events in each county and tech summit to be held at the International Peace Garden (tentatively scheduled for May of 2003).

Resources for youth and tech events within the Zone would include \$1,000 for each countywide event with a \$1,000 match. \$5,000 has been allocated for the International Peace Garden Tech Summit.

JoAnn Rodenbiker, Diane Olson, Justin Andrist, Larry Wanberg and Laura Every will be champions of these initiatives.

Additional resources will be directed towards the young entrepreneur fund that would include financial guarantee for the Bank of North Dakota Entrepreneur Fund. Funds up to \$25,000 will be allocated towards the used as guarantees and will be milestone based.

\$5,000 will be allocated for small, or micro, loans for youth/young adult based businesses that are leveraged with local commitments.

The CONAC Board will oversee the deployment of these funds.

Attention will be given for the development of youth internships that would include participation with EPSCOR and Job Service.

Diane Olson and Cindy Dockter will be responsible for overseeing this element of the youth related strategies.

□ **Develop cooperative web & traditional marketing effort to enhance tourism efforts within the Zone (27)**

While there is evidence that visitor attractions (including hunting and fishing) has been growing within the CONAC Zone, there is a noted lack of cooperative activity between providers within the Zone, although coordinated efforts may be mutually beneficial. The Devils Lake Tourism and Convention Bureau has aggregated providers locally with good success – this could serve as a role model for marketing cooperatively.

Efforts to address this strategy are already being enacted within the Zone. The CONAC REAP Board will review overall implementation efforts.

□ **Enhance/develop retention and expansion program focused towards local businesses and industry (25)**

Increasingly, there is a need nationally to identify threatened or expanding manufacturing and service companies and provide problem-solving and technical assistance to these firms. A comprehensive retention and expansion program should provide coordination of services and resources, assessment of industry issues and capacity building for local/regional economic development staff. A cohesive retention and expansion program promotes job growth by helping communities identify the concerns and barriers to survival and growth that local businesses face.

Potential and future efforts would include:

- Focusing on a few “key” businesses.
- Surrounding them with appropriate resources to spur growth.

Justin Andrist and Doug McDonald will be champions of this effort and review existing business models for success.

□ **Support the International Peace Garden's efforts to enhance and diversify its programming (19)**

The International Peace Garden has served as a unique memorial to the peace that has existed between the United States and Canada since 1932. Visitors from every American state and 70 countries visit the garden each year. The Peace Garden is a world-class venue for youth-oriented music, arts and leadership programs to enhance the mental, physical and ethical well being of mankind through education, interpretation and conservation.

The CONAC Board is supportive of efforts by the International Peace Garden. The Board needs to be kept abreast of efforts on behalf of the Peace Garden. The Board will request an update from Leon Richard or John McQueen on ongoing initiatives of the Peace Garden.

□ **Pursue IT outsourcing opportunities from North Dakota State government agencies for communities within the CONAC REAP Zone (19)**

North Dakota Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 4006 directed the Legislative Council to determine the feasibility of transferring state agencies or state employees to rural areas of the state. Further legislation was enacted providing incentives to encourage outsourcing of these jobs to rural areas.

There is a need within the CONAC Zone to:

- Expand marketing efforts about local companies (add to website)
- Solicit more information regarding State contracts
- Get procurement information from North Dakota Manufacturing Association

Diane Olson will talk to Cal Klewin and Aaron Krauter, from the SW REAP Zone, regarding ongoing efforts in the Southwest REAP Zone.

Preliminary budget allocated for this benchmark is \$10,000.

□ **Deploy Northern Great Plains Mainstreet Merchant Internet Training program (17)**

The Northern Great Plains Commission is deploying a Mainstreet Merchant Internet training program. Incorporating/providing this training to local and regional merchants will provide potential opportunities for the integration of IT into their core business practices.

Bill Davis of USDA Rural Development will serve as lead on this strategic element.

□ **Establish a Community Technology Center Network in the Zone (15)**

By integrating the resources and talents of a network of community technology centers, the Zone can move toward offering a unified labor force with the size and flexibility to meet the largest and/or the most specialized staffing and outsourcing challenges. These Centers would increase networking, enable multi-tasking and provide opportunities for citizens of all ages to participate.

Activities would include:

- Complete the Community Technology Center Network concept
- Identify future/continued funding for the existing centers

This effort will provide for better utilization of existing centers, better utilization of schools (community learning centers) and the incorporation of entrepreneurial activities. Benchmarks and budgets have already been allocated, through the REAP Board, to address this strategic element.

□ **Expand/develop educational consortium network throughout the CONAC Zone, review offerings to adult learners and private businesses within the Zone (13)**

Opportunities to participate (expand) into the Souris Loop-NW Region network will be examined by the REAP Board. REAP representatives, in conjunction with local and regional educators, will examine demand, cost and other administrative elements in review of potential expansion.

□ **Support existing and emerging industry cluster efforts in the REAP Zone and those at the State level relevant to local clusters (13)**

The CONAC REAP Zone is supportive of industry cluster efforts and will support efforts within the Zone to bolster the statewide effort. REAP Zone members will provide any information needed to existing companies within the Zone relating to the NEI Industry Cluster efforts.

Any financial support for these efforts will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Board.

□ **Create regional review team to assess opportunities to apply information and technology to commodity agricultural products to increase value and diversify local economies (11)**

REAP members, regional economic development staff and agriculture related organizations should develop an Agricultural Opportunity Team to review options for enhancing value added agricultural development within the Zone.

Curt Jacobson and Lanny Faliiede will prepare a Request for Proposals to fully develop this concept. Initial funding for this effort is \$2,500.

□ **Deploy RITE-Link (10)**

RITE-Link is a collaborative effort involving IT businesses, rural communities and universities designed to develop highly skilled IT professionals. RITE-Link trains people for careers in computer programming, systems analysis, network engineering and numerous other IT-related jobs. The RITE-Link project is funded by the National Science Foundation.

JoAnn Rodenbiker will connect with Mel Ustad regarding implementing/integrating this program into the CONAC REAP Zone.

□ **Establish a national demonstration program at MSU-Bottineau and Lake Region College for recruiting more international students (10)**

MSU-Bottineau and Lake Region College already have experience in working with international students in all phases of recruitment, matriculation and post-graduation placement. Delore Zimmerman will contact Dr. Grosz (MSU-Bottineau) regarding this element.

□ **Develop, deploy and support life-long learning opportunities for all CONAC REAP Zone residents (9)**

Efforts to maintain and upgrade skill sets throughout the region are a critical element of growing the region. The CONAC Zone has a well-developed k-12 educational system and postsecondary education is readily available at MSU-Bottineau, Turtle Mountain Community College, Cankdeska Cikana/Little Hoop Community College and Lake Region. Efforts should be made to determine need, identify and match jobs to training opportunities within the region.

Elements within this strategy include:

- Continued support of Women & Technology programming
- Support of ExplorNet
- k-12 schools should be encouraged to adopt and implement the Department of Public Instruction's Technology Plan.

The REAP Board is supportive of these efforts and will review potential financial support on a case-by-case basis.

□ **Create a regional portal web site (8)**

Creating a regional portal web site containing collaborative tools and regional information for REAP board members, economic development professionals, community leaders, and private enterprises. Existing efforts ([www.conac.org](http://www.conac.org)) will be reviewed and opportunities to link other sites will be assessed by the Board.

□ **Support development of potential wind energy opportunities (6)**

The bulk of the wind energy development (and potential) has been centered within the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation and Spirit Lake Nation. The CONAC REAP Zone should continue to be supportive of this opportunity and assist in the coordination of orderly development of potential wind energy opportunities within the Zone. Continued work, and support are needed to capture regional/state momentum.

The Board is supportive of wind energy potential and will review opportunities on a case-by-case basis.

□ **Establish a pilot “metro market liaison center” (5)**

Metropolitan areas are the primary engines of the economy, and as such offer opportunities for larger markets, outsourcing opportunities and the ability to find partners in the development of new business ventures.

The CONAC Board will assess opportunities as they arise as it relates to this strategy. Efforts to tie this into existing marketing efforts will be explored.

□ **Implement a Vital Centers program (5)**

The creation and development of new, micro- and small business enterprises is an important element in diversifying and growing the regional economy. A missing ingredient within the CONAC REAP Zone is a focal point for providing startup and early-stage companies with the expertise and management support they need. Elements of this are addressed through the technology centers in Bottineau, Leeds and Maddock.

Opportunities to build on this concept will be addressed, and reviewed, by the Board and will be complimented by efforts related to the Community Technology Center Network strategy.

□ **Review “Local Ties” program (3)**

Local Ties, Inc. is developing an Internet-based network dedicated to re-energizing and revitalizing rural communities. The Local Ties network and it's set of tools will help member communities help themselves in the following four major areas:

1. Promoting local businesses and merchants to the world outside of the local community
2. Interactively highlighting and promoting local tourism and recreational activities
3. Promoting economic development incentives and new business opportunities
4. Attracting and securing new charitable donations to local non-profit organizations

The Local Ties business model leverages the cost-effective communication power of the Internet and one of any community's greatest assets; those people not currently living in the area but who have some interest and commitment to its economic well-being.

The CONAC REAP Zone will request a formal presentation of the concept to be made by Jeff Pester of Local Ties, Inc.

□ **Create an online regional conversation (3)**

The single most important factor in determining the success of a community portal is the quality of content and its degree of utility for its target audience. This can be enhanced through the development of an online regional conversation. The board will review this element for opportunities to tie it into existing regional website ([www.conac.org](http://www.conac.org)) and other web related sites.

□ **Develop and maintain collaborative partnerships to support local/regional growth (1)**

By thinking, planning, and working together, the individuals and groups that comprise the SW REAP Zone can accomplish goals that any could achieve alone. Efforts to enhance and sustain existing collaborative partnerships to support regional growth are critical in accomplishing region-wide goals and projects.

Organizations within the CONAC REAP Zone are currently working effectively together on many fronts. The REAP Board will provide overall assistance, as needed, to foster more effective partnering opportunities.