

Southwest REAP Zone Information Technology Plan Implementation



Implementation strategies, preliminary budgets and benchmarks for the Southwest REAP Zone Information Technology Plan were developed and prioritized on May 9th, 2002 following a SW REAP Board meeting held at the DSU North Campus building in Dickinson. Goals and strategies were categorized as first, second or third tier strategies based on need, momentum, opportunity and potential impact in the region. (rank points)

FIRST TIER STRATEGIES

□ Young people retention strategies (40)

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

- Internships
- Tech events
- Classes on community leadership
- Youth (and young adults) marketing

There is an existing “youth coordinator” in the Zone, located in Dunn County (on a part-time basis). An opportunity exists to utilize this individual (as a youth technology “circuit rider” to further develop this process.

Linda Kittilson will serve as lead on this strategy element. Preliminary budget allocated for this “benchmark” is \$120,000.

□ Pursue IT outsourcing opportunities from North Dakota state government agencies for communities within the Southwest REAP Zone (29)

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. Action items include:

- Meeting together with OMB to review this action.
- Addressing this officially as a REAP Zone.
- (Potentially) surveying state employees and agency heads.
- Issuing a press release regarding potential actions by state.

Aaron Krauter and Cal Klewin will head up this element for the Southwest REAP Zone. Opportunities exist to work collaboratively with the CONAC REAP Zone (Diane Olson of the Bottineau EDC is heading up a similar effort for CONAC). Preliminary budget allocated for this “benchmark” is \$7,500.

□ **Establish a Community Technology Center Network in the Zone (22)**

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 in the network society.

Benchmarks 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 facilitation of entrepreneurial activities.

Ben Bernard will serve as the champion for this initiative and work collaboratively with regional JDAs, Mel Bauer-Dukart (USDA Rural Development), students and local providers (including Glen Geise).

Preliminary budget allocated for this “benchmark” is \$16,500 per county for 3 years.

□ **Deploy life-long learning opportunities (22)**

Efforts to maintain and upgrade skillsets throughout the region are a critical element of growing the region. The SW has a well-developed k-12 educational system and postsecondary education is readily available at DSU. 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 and USDA Rural Development (Mel Bauer-Dukart) will work collaboratively to assess ongoing and future efforts for potential implementation and funding. Partnerships in this element will include representatives from the Women & Technology program, local schools, Dickinson State University and Bismarck State College.

Funding will be contingent on review by the board and allocated based on need, cost and impact on a case-by-case basis.

□ [Establish technology internship program for high school and college students \(20\)](#)

This project would potentially help to educate and encourage new technology entrepreneurs in the SW REAP Zone to start and grow new businesses. It would also provide assistance to currently operating companies by incorporating IT into their core business functions.

Benchmark:

- Examine needs and jobs and match to internal and external opportunities
- Review, develop freelance opportunities
- Identify students (Senior High and College) and mentors

The project lead will be someone from the local school systems (from school to work programs). Partners for this program would include DSU, SW Information Technology Council and the youth technology circuit rider

Seed money is tentatively allocated at \$18,000.

□ [Establish national demo for international student recruitment and regional assimilation \(20\)](#)

Dickinson State University already has experience in working with international students in all phases of recruitment, matriculation and post-graduation placement. Efforts should be made to create student into internships with local businesses and organizations(both profit and not-for-profit) and integrate them into the workplace.

Components of this effort include:

- Develop plan for implementation
- Link to internships and job shadowing
- Work for waiver of wage requirement

Representatives from DSU will lead this element, working with local developers.

Budget allocation is \$5,000 to \$7,500.

SECOND TIER STRATEGIES

□ [Regional portal development \(17\)](#)

Creating a regional portal web site containing collaborative tools and regional information for REAP board members, economic development professionals, community leaders, and private enterprises has been reviewed and an RFP has been developed. Continued efforts to develop this are ongoing.

Benchmarks include:

- Review of proposals
- Review of content and layout

Ben Bernard will serve as liaison to the REAP Board. The SW Information Technology Council will provide insight and partnering on this element.

Financial support for this element is \$40,000.

□ [Wind energy \(16\)](#)

The Southwest REAP Zone has been aggressive in their support and coordination of orderly development of potential wind energy opportunities within the Zone. Continued work, and support are needed to capture regional momentum.

Benchmarks include:

- Continued monitoring of existing sites
- Identification of other opportunities (power generation, spin-off opportunities)
- Identification of potential partnering opportunities

John Bacon (Dunn County JDA) will work with representatives from USDA Rural Development to refine and promote these opportunities.

Potential budget for this strategic element is \$35,000.

□ **Support existing collaborative relationship (15)**

By thinking, planning, and working together the individuals and groups that comprise the SW REAP Zone can accomplish goals that could not be achieved alone. Efforts to enhance and sustain existing collaborative partnerships to support regional growth are critical in accomplishing region-wide goals and projects.

Potential partners include (but are not limited to):

- SW Information Technology Council
- Manufacturers Roundtable
- New Economy Initiative
- Women & Technology
- Regional wind developers

The REAP Board will work to develop a more cohesive agenda in collaboration with regional and statewide groups including other REAP and Champion communities.

□ **Center for Business Development (15)**

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 SW REAP Zone is a focal point for providing startup and early-stage companies with the expertise and management support they need.

Efforts to support this strategy include:

- Make resources of DSU more available
- Review (old) Elks building as an option for development into a Business Development Center

JDA's and other potential business assistance providers should connect with representatives from DSU after identifying business assistance needs from small business. The REAP Board should assess and review the development of the (old) Elks building in downtown Dickinson as a potential site for Business Development Center.

□ **Metro market liaison program (15)**

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. Tasks related to this strategy include:

- Feasibility analysis
- Need more specification on concept and potential rollout

The REAP Board will review options as they regard to this strategy and implement action steps as needed.

□ [Dakota West Brand \(14\)](#)

The development of a regional identity is critical in attracting tourists. Tourists know no boundaries but are attracted to a comprehensive venue of attractions that is marketed as a “package” with a specific brand. The Dakota West Adventures group has captured this and exploited it with much success. Efforts to grow this brand within the region should be built upon and used in conjunction with other activities related to retail and the recruitment of people and companies.

Regional developers should take it upon themselves to promote the area as Dakota West, building on existing success within the region..

□ [NGP Mainstreet Merchant program \(14\)](#)

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.

□ [Veterinary diagnostics lab \(13\)](#)

The Southwest REAP Zone is cattle country but lacks local access to quality veterinary diagnostic support and services such as those provided by the ND Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (Fargo) and similar bull semen labs in neighboring Montana. Efforts should be made to explore opportunities to fill this void locally.

Benchmarks could include:

- Local assessment of need/demand
- Review of certification requirements

Cal Klewin will lead this effort. Support should/could be provided by Lynn Obregewitch of Medora.

□ [Dakota West Vital Centers program \(11\)](#)

The development of a “vital centers” program should focus on efforts to revitalize city centers in the smaller communities within the region and provide coherency to the landscape for visitors to the region.

The Southwest REAP Zone should contact the NDSU design team and request a proposal for the team to review and assess opportunities within the SW.

John Bacon and Mike Taylor will lead this effort and report to the REAP board when appropriate.

THIRD TIER STRATEGIES

□ [Support cluster efforts](#)

While supportive of the industry cluster efforts in the state (driven by the New Economy Initiative), the Southwest REAP board has determined that it will provide financial support to cluster initiatives that will directly impact the SW REAP Zone.

The Board will review any opportunities on a case-by-case basis.

□ [RITE-Link](#)

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.

Jeff Hoffman (former REAP/Champion Alliance Director) originally made contact with Mel Ustad regarding this opportunity. Ben Bernard will follow up on this element.

□ [TRF Institute](#)

Generally, the participants were supportive of Theodore Roosevelt Institute Leadership and Management Training Retreat Center, but did not have enough specific information regarding the effort.

The REAP Board will request general information regarding the TRF Institute.

□ [Population symposium](#)

The board is supportive of the Population Symposium, feeling it positively impacts the region and provides insight into challenges and opportunities within the Zone. Opportunities to enhance the symposium may include a focus on specific issues such as entrepreneurship, technology or immigration. Adding a technology exposition component may help to broaden infrastructures issues within the region.

DSU is the lead on the Symposium, the REAP Board should assist as needed and provide insight to helping grow the Symposium.

□ Online regional conversation

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.

Ben Bernard is assessing elements of this with www.vastlane.org as a potential model. This is a component of the regional portal strategy. Funding is included in that strategic element.

□ Use IVN for trades education

There is a growing demand for trained trades people in the Southwest REAP Zone but a lack of local training opportunities. Often young adults leave the area for training to never return. Opportunities to provide this training via IVN are there but need to be defined and implemented.

- Identify and quantify needs and opportunities
- Identify educational components and training institutions

Local educators (including DSU) and service providers should lead in this strategic element. Partners could include Women and Technology and Bismarck State College.

□ Local Ties program

Local Ties, Inc. is developing an Internet-based network dedicated to re-energizing and revitalizing rural communities. 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 Local Ties network and its 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 Southwest REAP Zone will request a formal presentation of the concept to be made by Jeff Pester of Local Ties, Inc.