

Northeast Iowa Business Network Action Plan

January 30, 2020



Northeast Iowa

BUSINESS NETWORK

Facilitated by:

Eric Christianson
ISU Extension Field
Specialist
ejchr@iastate.edu

Jane Goeken
ISU Extension Field
Specialist
jngoeken@iastate.edu

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach
Community and Economic Development

www.extension.iastate.edu/communities

Northeast Iowa Business Network Action Planning Report

Introduction

As part of the The Northeast Iowa Business Network’s grant with the U.S. Department of Commerce and contract with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO)’s Community and Economic Development program, an action planning session was performed to examine themes drawn out from the primary and secondary data studies generated by ISUEO CED. The process included visioning, identifying priorities, and strategic planning. Jane Goeken and Eric Christianson, ISUEO community development specialists, agreed to organize and facilitate a process that involved the following steps:

1. Conduct a visioning and action planning session with stakeholders.
2. Preparation of a final report including:
 - a. Participants’ vision for the Northeast Iowa area
 - b. Environmental scan
 - c. Development of a timeline and identification of a “champion” for each action step

In addition, other regional Field Specialists were tapped to review the data and action plan and make further recommendations on similar programs and potential resources that may be of interest to the NIBN group. Those recommendations are included in this report.

Work Session

Nine stakeholders participated in a visioning work session facilitated by ISUEO on January 30, 2020, in the Northeast Iowa Wellness & Recreation Center in Postville. Biswa Das, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, and Liesel Eathington, Assistant Scientist, from Iowa State University also joined to provide their expertise and recommendations.

A Vision for The Northeast Iowa Business Network

The group first imagined success and answered the question:

“When we have successfully taken the actions that we put in this plan in 3-5 years, what is different in our region?”

After listing a number of goals, the group categorized them into named themes and then voted on those themes in order to prioritize them.

Our Vision for our Region:

Thriving Connected Communities

- People are visibly enjoying their communities – pride
- Building and strengthening social capital
- Places to congregate that are utilized
- Nurture new and young leadership
- Attractive neighborhoods
- Have communities of choice
- Be a “region of choice”
- Expanded childcare options
- Easy low-cost reliable internet

Innovative and Engaged Employers

- Happy employees
- Have employers of choice
- Employers buying into lifelong development for employees
- Employers investment in workforce
- Business-school connection strengthened
- Competitive benefits packages, including childcare

New and Expanded Businesses

- Successful business succession
- New entrepreneurs
- Vibrant downtowns
- Planned business expansions have occurred
- Pool resources; focus on issues, not individual silos
- Taxi/Uber

Expanded Housing Solutions

- Housing for my grandma (affordable and comfortable)
- Housing for my grandchildren (affordable, safe, and comfortable)
- The right homes for the right people
- More affordable rental property (rehab?)
- More affordable housing units for purchase.

Leveraging Recreation Potential

- Trails and events, pocket parks, dog parks
- Investing in amenities
- Leveraging recreational potential

Attract and Retain People

- Increased diverse populations – 5%
- Stop population decline

Understanding our Situation

To ensure that the plan created reflects a realistic path forward, the group took a moment to consider their ability to succeed. They were asked what their strengths and weaknesses were both as a group and as a region in terms of accomplishing the vision set forth above.

Strengths and Weaknesses as a Team

Strengths as a Team	Weaknesses as a Team
<p>We have strong connections with state and federal agencies</p> <p>Strong connections with funders locally and regionally</p> <p>Some financing background and expertise</p> <p>We have a wide range of educational backgrounds</p> <p>Good organizational framework to work within</p> <p>Passion</p> <p>Understand region’s strengths, weaknesses, limitations</p> <p>Recognize potential (undiscovered gem)</p>	<p>We all have our day job (no one works for NIBN full time)</p> <p>Fewer grant opportunities</p> <p>Higher local match requirements for grants</p> <p>Each county funds its econ dev in a different way</p> <p>Long-term regional grudges</p> <p>Education needed about benefits of working together</p> <p>Education of city and county officials needed</p> <p>Local leadership sometimes lacking</p> <p>Volunteers overwhelmed</p> <p>All of us going to same utilities for board membership</p> <p>Transportation funding</p>

The participants in the session also considered the potential outcomes of success. The benefits of success reflect some of the positive outcomes that will result if the vision becomes reality. The dangers of success are focused on potential negative outcomes that may result even if the network is successfully able to bring this vision to reality.

Benefits and Dangers of Success

Benefits of Success	Dangers of Success
Can access more money as region Show our boards that all counties have the same or similar issues We care about community we live in Come up with better ideas together Collaboration What’s good for one county helps all counties; we have a large laborshed	Existing businesses don’t want competition Jealousy if one area sees more growth Racism/ people resistant to increasing diversity Some don’t want growth, change Crime Stress on community capacity (infrastructure)

Action Planning

Next, the group was asked to identify specific actions that must be taken in order to bring the above vision to reality. The suggested actions were sorted into groups based on which actions should be handled by the same working group. After sorting, attendees were asked to separate themselves into working groups based around the actions. Three groups were formed:

- **Home Bodies (Making Northeast Iowa Home)**
- **Building Community (Kissin Kousins)**
- **Boosting Business (Slackers)**

The team members listed with each group identified themselves as responsible for ensuring that the goals listed under each working group are accomplished. The goals listed below will serve as a starting point, but the team members may add or modify action steps as they make progress. Team members took home more detailed sheets that included specific actions steps, goals listed below are broad.

Teams Leaders:

- Homebodies** – Jason Passmore
- Building Community** – Valerie Reinke
- Boosting Business** – Stephanie Fromm

Commitments

- Going forward the groups will have to continue to meet to carry out the actions set forth in this strategic plan.

- The teams will continue to meet virtually or in person at least once a month depending on the needs of the group and the progress being made. The team leaders are responsible for coordinating these meetings.
- The team leaders will communicate their progress with the leadership board at their monthly meetings.
- The full group will meet in person every 6 months to share updates and reassess progress and goals.

Homebodies

Team Lead: Jason Passmore

Team Members: Darla Kelchen

Goal	Timeline
Create reliable and inexpensive transportation network (buses)	1 st Quarter 2020
Promote CDBG housing programs	1 st Quarter 2020
Promote housing trust fund and other rehab programs	1 st Quarter 2020
Create inventory of available lots and vacant homes	2 nd -4 th Quarter 2020
Host housing summit	3 rd Quarter 2020
Host regional workshop for contractors	4 th Quarter 2020
Work with Homes for Iowa – bring in 4 homes 2020	1 st -3 rd Quarter 2021
Bring in CHI (for example school rehabs)	1 st Quarter 2021
Longer term	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing funding to secure builders down payment for spec loans 	

Building Community (Kissin Kousins)

Team Lead: Valerie Reinke

Team Members: Shelly

Goal	Timeline
Continue regional trail work with UERPC and partners	1 st Quarter 2020
Sponsor community tourism programs	1 st Quarter 2020
Allow and enable young professionals to gather	1 st Quarter 2021
Develop/host local leadership program	3 rd Quarter 2021
Promote block parties/neighborhood gatherings	1 st Quarter 2022
Reduce daycare deficit / desert <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write CDBG grant for daycare 2. Collect data on business needs 3. Collect data on number of kids 4. Identify barriers to employer provided daycare 	1 st Quarter 2022
Rebrand and rejuvenate old service organizations	1 st Quarter 2022

Boosting Business (Slackers)

Team Lead: Stephanie Fromm

Team Members: Mallory Hanson, Diana Johnson, Lisa Curtin

Goal	Timeline
Partner with Employers Council of Iowa; promote their platform	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2020
Improve leverage with utilities	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2020
Continue and expand STEM festival / camps	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2020
Connect with NICC CEO network and pilot 2 innovative work programs	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2020
Promote wellness programs – host panel	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2020
Create “How to Start a Business” manual	3 rd -4 th Quarter 2020
Create Storyboard / Press online for this project	3 rd -4 th Quarter 2020
Create a shared Human Resource / network for local businesses	1 st -2 nd Quarter 2021
Arrange visits – thriving communities to learn what they’re doing	3 rd -4 th Quarter 2021
Longer term	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop connections / listing of options to enhance immigrant recruitment • Develop pull-up and other promotional items on business community 	

FIELD SPECIALIST RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were offered by other ISUEO Field Specialists, after review of the Action Plan and Primary & Secondary Data.

- Focus time and energy on NIBN’s website. There are broken links, meeting minutes have not been updated since 2011, and it mostly contains links to other organization’s websites. One example of a great site is Western Iowa Advantage’s:
<http://www.westerniowaadvantage.com/>
They also have an active social media presence:
<https://www.facebook.com/WesternIowaAdvantage/> and https://twitter.com/iowa_western
Some of the recommended updates to the website include: promote CDBG housing programs, promote housing trust fund and other rehab programs, maintain a list of available lots and vacant homes, promote Employers Council of Iowa, promote wellness programs, and host a “How to Start a Business” manual which surely exists somewhere already. Work on this type of project would be something that would also strengthen their organizational capacity to undertake some of the more ambitious projects they have identified.
- Several of the goals outlined use the group’s ability to convene others, i.e., a housing summit, regional workshop for contractors, sponsoring community tourism programs, and developing/hosting local leadership programs. ISU has several existing programs and have held workshops on these topics. We could either be a partner or share resources used to develop those programs:
 - Western Iowa Advantage hosts a successful Employer-Educator summit:
<https://www.1380kcim.com/news/2018/registration-open-for-next-employer-educator-summit/>
 - ISU developed housing conferences in Fairfield and Spencer:
<https://pathfindersrcd.org/what-we-do/housing/housingconference/>
 - Scott Timm, Field Specialist in Decorah, has organized workshops and trainings for builders, has resources and colleagues who could be of help.
- The RHRA workbook
https://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/files/page/files/rhra_final.pdf, is a questionnaire and workbook that helps communities self-assess their housing situation, and guides communities as they begin to consider options for providing existing and potential residents with safe, secure, and quality housing that meets their needs and fits within their budgets. It is an inventory of plans, programs, funding sources, and information available that will help the community “ground truth” their housing situation. ISUEO CED, working with IEDA, is rolling out a more comprehensive program to support communities with follow up support to this assessment.

- There are different types of housing developers for different types of housing. A local contractor might be a good choice to provide small-scale, single-family homes on infill lots. The complexity of multi-family housing for low-income populations, senior citizens, or special needs populations usually means working with a nonprofit or for-profit developer with experience in housing finance. Nonprofits such as Community Housing Initiatives, Anawim Housing, or Habitat for Humanity work on affordable housing projects. Other large for-profit developers include Hubbell Realty, Conlin Properties, and Knapp Properties also work statewide. Iowa Finance Authority may be helpful in identifying other developers they have provided funding for in northeast Iowa.
- Center for Community Progress great resource for looking at vacant lot use, a literal goldmine of resources. They have a great website and training.
<https://www.communityprogress.net/>
- NIBN should connect with Housing Assistance Council (HAC) – they are a clearing house for rural housing resources, technical assistance around financing for some government assistance programs. They work with non-profits or communities...maybe they could hold a training for the region? <http://www.ruralhome.org>
- Entrepreneurs – people need to gather together on a REGULAR basis to talk about entrepreneurship, and share what they need. Model a program such as 1 Million Cups: <https://www.1millioncups.com/desmoines>
- Perform an audit of all of the local community foundations – how much funding is available in communities, create strategy to funnel entrepreneurs and projects towards known funding streams.
- Consider reaching out to similar networks in Iowa to discuss shared issues, such as the Southwest Iowa Coalition
- Connect with your local Extension Office for STEM Resources and programming: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/stem-lit-go-0>
- How can you share housing resources across communities? Can you share, for example, a rental inspector across multiple communities? Develop shared resource plan
- Do you have a connection with the Greater Des Moines Partnership’s leadership program (<http://www.gdml.com/CommunityLeadershipProgram>), or Leadership Iowa (<https://www.iowaabi.org/leadership-iowa/>)?
- NIBN should learn more about Neighborworks and investigate if they can become an affiliate. <https://www.neighborworks.org>
- Encourage cross-sector use of guidelines such as the Department of Health & Human Service’s CLAS (Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services) standards which are designed to promote equity, reduce disparities and improve outcomes.
<https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas/>
- Customized training for organizations employing, serving and marketing to diverse community members will prove mutually beneficial for the organizations and the newcomers.

- The diversity of legal statuses and responsibility on employers can make it a difficult process to employ immigrants. Promote nationally available resources to local employers including webinars that describe best practices and legal responsibilities for recruiting and hiring immigrants. Consider developing a local Frequently Asked Questions sheet for employers with contact information for local resources (attorneys, non-profits, etc...).
- National best practices for creating local plans to attract a diverse workforce can be found here: <http://gatewaysforgrowth.org/>
- Best practices for creating or promoting local cultural festivals to become more welcoming and diverse communities including participation in national “Welcoming Week” can be found here: <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-week>
- There are best practices that have been for community development initiatives that are welcoming to diverse audiences: <https://groundworkusa.org/eqdevtools/best-practices-community-engagement/>

AGENDA

NORTHEAST IOWA BUSINESS NETWORK ACTION PLANNING SESSION

**Thursday January 30, 2020
10:30 AM – 4:30 PM
Postville YMCA**

- 10:30 AM** Introductions and Opening Comments
- a. Name, Tenure, and Background
- 10:45 AM** General Overview of the Meeting and the Action Planning
- b. The Ground Rules for this session
- 11:00 AM** Setting a Vision for the Region
- a. Desired outcome for this process
 - b. Set commitments for the future
- 12:30 PM** Lunch Break
- 1:00 PM** Understanding our Position
- a. Discussion regarding strengths and weaknesses of group and region
- 2:00 PM** Action Planning
- a. Listing and explanations of potential and existing Programs, Policies, Projects and Initiatives
 - b. Creation of work groups
 - c. Action planning
 - d. Report out
- 4:00 PM** Commitments
- 4:30 PM** Adjourn