

Rural Communities' Road Map to Economic Development

Outline Of Need:

Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDDD) consisted of an 8 county service area that encompassed 79 communities as of mid 2004. SENDDD's service area grew to a total of 15 counties and more than 135 communities by year's end.

The economic scenario for this rural area of the state was two-fold. Commuter areas (located near to Lincoln and Omaha metro areas) showed signs of improving economic development while other portions continued to experience outmigration resulting in decreased economic opportunities. What caused this economic demise in these non commuter areas? The survival and support of the agriculture base had been focused upon with little or no resources identified for attracting new industries which would create jobs and make residents stay and invest in their rural communities.

How Rural Development Helped:

USDA Rural Development awarded a rural business opportunity grant (RBOG) of \$49,000 to SENDDD on September 21, 2004. The monies were used to complete a Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) for the SENDDD service area. SENDDD prepared, facilitated, and authored the REDS for southeast Nebraska with direct supervision provided by participating communities/counties and their appointed Economic Development Committees. SENDDD's extensive knowledge of the dynamics of southeast Nebraska, which came from its "hands on" experience, was instrumental in compiling the REDS.

"The assistance provided by USDA Rural Development was invaluable to the political subdivisions of the expansion area and SENDDD.

--Executive Director George H. Frye-Southeast Nebraska Development District

The cornerstone of the REDS is its' framework for more regional cooperation and aligned action. The process realizes that regional economic development decisions must be based on the region's human and physical resources, external influences, and public-private financing capacity. The REDS seeks to advance the regional economy by focusing on priorities articulated in the plan. By assigning the collective know-how, skills, resources and energies; regional stakeholders have the critical mass and local support to create new jobs, foster a more stable and diverse regional economy, improve living conditions in rural communities/counties, and provide a mechanism for guiding and coordinating economic development efforts.

The Results:

SENDDD will use the REDS as a tool in providing its' service area with the knowledge, skills and vast insight needed to bring about positive change in today's challenging economic climate.

"Counties and municipalities were afforded an opportunity to establish goals, objectives, and strategies and to identify specific projects needing attention. With SENDDD staff being responsible for guiding the REDS process; we were able to demonstrate an immediate impact by tackling projects as they were being identified. This resulted, during the nearly 3-year planning period, in a total of 26 projects that were initiated or accomplished for 19 political subdivisions that secured nearly \$6.5 million in grants and leveraged over \$131.9 million in additional project investments."

"Projects accomplished to-date has run the gamut from feasibility studies, tourist attractions and business development, to public infrastructure and housing."

--Executive Director George H. Frve-Southeast Nebraska Development District