

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Griggs-Steele Empowerment Zone

The Griggs-Steele Empowerment Zone hired an Executive Director on October 15, 1999, 8 full months after designation as an EZ. The Director brings significant experience with the EZ/EC initiative, having worked for the Southwest Georgia United Empowerment Zone (formerly Crisp/Dooly EC). Hiring a Director with experience and using the Lake Agassiz Regional Development Council's expertise in managing revolving loan funds has allowed the community to move forward quickly in developing the Griggs-Steele Revolving Loan Fund. On December 1, 1999, policies and procedures were finalized and an Interim Loan Committee was established to deal with pending loan applications. The committee will function until community meetings are held to review progress and appoint a permanent loan committee, or until April 1, 2000, whichever comes first.

Each Benchmark Leader has been asked to provide updated project information necessary for decision making on Phase 1 projects. This information will be taken to the community for input and prioritizing of projects. Community meetings will be held in late January or early February to reprioritize projects and establish budgets under Phase 1 of the strategic plan.

The Griggs-Steele EZ has been invited to participate in the development of an Upper Midwest Peer to Peer Network. This network of EZ/EC practitioners will provide valuable lessons to each other in best practices and increase capacity building among the Zones and Communities. The new Director has been in contact with the following agencies in an effort to develop long-term resources to assist in sustaining development activities in the zone: Lake Agassiz Regional Development Council South Central Dakota Regional Council Job Service North Dakota Bank of North Dakota North Dakota Department of Economic Development & Finance Greater North Dakota Association North Dakota Rural Development Council Economic Development Association of North Dakota SBA/One Stop Capital Center/Business Information Center NDSU Extension Service North Dakota State College of Science North Dakota State Board for Vocational & Technical Education North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives Additional partnerships/alliances will be the main focus of the EZ Director in the coming months.

The lack of availability of funds early in the year caused significant problems both at the community level and at the governance level of this EZ. Administrative funds were needed early on to staff the EZ office and provide the administrative support needed by the Board of Directors to move forward in implementing the plan. Project funds were needed early on to develop projects that require the maximum amount of good weather available in North Dakota. The community has lost significant ground in moving forward with projects, particularly the development of industrial parks and other construction projects included in Phase 1 of the strategic plan.

The 14-member Board of Directors dedicated themselves to managing the Zone and the process by meeting at least twice each month and educating themselves on governance issues in preparation for hiring a Director. The USDA/RD State Office was helpful in sharing lessons learned from Round I EZ/EC Communities, especially in the area of governance. The 8 months the community was without a Director was used to develop the policy-making skills of the governing board. The Carver Model of management was adopted in early summer of 1999.

It is a little early for this EZ to disseminate best practice models for other communities. However, from an Executive Director's point of view, the Carver Model of management should be widely used in the EZ/EC initiative.

Without doubt, the most complicated task at hand is to ensure that the federal agencies represented on the Community Empowerment Board provide for the review of out-migration criteria as well as poverty criteria when developing scoring guidelines for program funding. After all, the end result of years of out-migration is the creation of poverty.