

2001 Annual Report Executive Summary

Northwoods NiiJii Enterprise Community

Northwoods NiiJii Enterprise Community, Inc. is a partnership of three (3) Tribes, the Menominee Nation, the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa, and the Sokaogon Band of Mole Lake Chippewa, and eight (8) rural governments, whose mission is to alleviate poverty and to do so in a manner that promotes resource conserving, environmentally sustainable economic development. Based on the principles and wisdom of Native American culture and spirituality, the organization's development strategies are holistic and acknowledge that, like a web, actions taken toward a single strand have implications for other strands in a concentric circle outward. The organization earned the designation of Enterprise Community in August 1999, after completing a comprehensive community driven strategic planning process and proving that the collaborating communities represented some of the most impoverished in the Nation.

Northwoods NiiJii Enterprise Community has adopted the EZ/EC Principals of economic opportunity, sustainable development, community-based partnerships, strategic vision of change, and a grassroots approach, and woven these through every thread of their activity. The strategic plan identified ten (10) strategic goals and proposed a comprehensive list of projects covering the gamut of development needs. Three active community groups, on each respective Reservation, have guided program development and translated the comprehensive strategic goals into sixty-six (66) discrete projects, or Benchmarks. These Benchmark reports are detailed in the body of the Annual Report. Some of the project accomplishments are highlighted here by category.

Business Development:

- Granted 130 micro-loans and loan guarantees totaling \$490,000 to individuals for business start-ups, expansion, education and job related activities and implemented a matched savings program for community members in Lac du Flambeau.
- Established a producing 10-acre U-pick sustainable farm demonstration now in the expansion phase in Lac du Flambeau.
- Facilitated purchase of 75 acres of land to create an industrial park in Shawano.
- Implemented business development efforts in Shawano County, and the Menominee and Mole Lake Reservations, resulting in 22 new/expanded businesses, and 387 new or retained jobs for adults and youth.
- Launched the Menominee Tribal Enterprises Value-Added Center, a secondary wood products manufacturing operation, generating nearly \$2 million in funding for construction and capital equipment, creating new jobs and retaining existing ones.
- Built the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Resource Center for small business counseling, human capital development, visitor information, and family and financial education.
- Launched the Menominee Arts and Crafts Cooperative and funded an incubator Project Manager.

Capacity Building:

- Obtained two grant writer positions and two VISTA volunteers for community organization, capacity building and project management.
- Sent Local government officials to training conferences on sustainable community development.
- Founded two (2) non-profit organizations to facilitate implementation of the long-term strategic plan. · Engaged 100 volunteers as Benchmark and Task Leaders.
- Organized 982 community members to guide and assist in the achievement of the projects.
- Formed 161 partnerships and alliances to support 66 community projects.

Community, Family and Youth Programs:

- Formed of a Human Resources Committee made up of volunteers who address urgent needs of low income and elderly community members in the Nashville/Mole Lake area and surrounding townships. Established a crisis fund to respond to these needs. Established partnerships with social service organizations to facilitate and coordinate service delivery. Attracted affordable bussing services.
- Linked 65 Menominee youth to summer and after school work experiences including positions with government, service organizations, manufacturing and retail careers. · Provided elder and disabled services to an additional 100 families on the Menominee.

Reservation. Education:

- Expanding facilities of the College of the Menominee Nation.
- Established an after-school tutorial for middle school students in Mole Lake.
- Began renovations of NAES College.

Environmental & Natural Resources:

- Preserved 46,720 acres from environmental degradation due to mining, and improved water and air quality standards on two Reservations.
- Renovated a fish hatchery on the Mole Lake Reservation, producing nearly 5 million fry.

Health & Housing:

- Launched construction of two Reservation health clinic/medical center facilities.
- Initiated two affordable housing programs; an employer assisted program in Shawano County and matched savings and loan guarantee programs in Lac du Flambeau.
- Built a low-income multi-family housing unit serving ten (10) families, and constructed or rehabilitated 77 homes.

Public Infrastructure & Public Safety:

- Expanded three water and sewer systems in Lac du Flambeau and Mole Lake and funded a fourth on the Menominee Reservation.
- Rehabilitated/constructed roads in Lac du Flambeau.
- Constructed a neighborhood playground on the Menominee Reservation.
- Raised \$400 thousand toward road improvements needed for fire protection and improved safety in Nashville/Mole Lake area.
- Installed fire numbers on houses on the Mole Lake and Menominee Reservations and connected 40 families to 911 emergency services.
- Implemented traffic measures to improve child safety in Mole Lake.
- Installed nearly four hundred streetlights on the Menominee Reservation.
- Implemented two Reservation solid waste/garbage disposal systems.

Tourism & Culture:

- Published brochures, designed tours, and marketed Native American cultural, heritage and nature-based opportunities internationally for members of the Enterprise Community. · Constructed a bridge and new snowmobile trail as part of the multi-purpose linked trail system plan for Lac du Flambeau and surrounding communities.
- Produced and distributed 500 Menominee language tapes and manuals, and launched cultural museum project.
- Established an eco-trail and initiated cultural museum project to provide two tourism destination sites in Mole Lake.

Now, at the end 2001, the organization, having expended it's first year funding of \$250,000, has launched these projects with a staff of two persons, an Executive Director and Administrative Assistant, a 15 member Board of Directors and nearly 100 volunteers who serve as Benchmark or Task Leaders. Approximately 682 community members have been involved this year as community group members or participants in focus groups and an additional 300 have provided survey input to assist in program development. Another 161 partnerships and alliances have been engaged in collaboration with the projects, giving support to community groups and providing resources and input to project planning, development, and implementation.

These partnerships and alliances are representative of the entire diverse range of assets that can be brought to bear to effect development; from local to international foundations and non-profit organizations, from neighborhood associations to religious institutions to federal, state and municipal agencies, from land-grant universities to private and corporate contributions. In-kind contributions from these various sources are valued at \$ 3.5 million. These staff, volunteers and partners from the communities combined, have applied for an additional \$42 million, and successfully leveraged \$21 million in funds for project implementation, realizing the extraordinary leveraging ratio of \$84 to every \$1 invested by USDA in seed funds to the Enterprise Community. Already impact is being seen in the communities, with several projects having been completed. However, as noted in the detailed reports, many project efforts are still in their first year of implementation, are entering into feasibility studies, or are in fund seeking stages.

The total impact of the sixty-six (66) projects underway, at the end of the 10 year Enterprise Community timeline is anticipated to be substantial, and will be reflected in improvements in indicators of poverty (employment, family income, etc.). Common obstacles and challenges can be generalized across projects and across Reservations. The most prevalent constraining factor at this time is human capacity; in terms of skills to identify and obtain funding, lead initiatives, and implement projects. Nineteen (19) out of the sixty-six (66) projects, or 28%, identified fund identification and grant writing as the number one concern in moving their projects forward. Eight (8) projects are facing problems of leadership either due to turnover of members or lack of community support and focus. Six (6) projects are constrained by the inability to locate or access qualified volunteer personnel for project implementation. Northwoods NiiJii continues to seek support funds to build community capacity in these three (3) areas. The organization is seeking funding for staff to serve as mentors and organizers for community groups and to assist with fund raising and project management. It has initiated application for additional VISTA volunteers to serve in community capacity building roles. It is identifying sources of free community training to build grant writing skills. NiiJii is also planning to implement leadership building training in the upcoming year. The number one priority for the Northwoods NiiJii Enterprise Community in the next year will be to diversify administrative funding to gain a measure of institutional sustainability, especially after the Presidential Budget for 2003 proposed a zero level of funding for the EZ/EC initiatives. Thereafter, funding will be sought for staff to support community capacity building efforts, and for consultants to assist in the continuous community input and evaluation components of the program necessary to effectively monitor and evaluate community initiatives and revise the strategic plan. Finally, the total of the individual project budgets reflects an approximate \$75 million in planned economic development activities; half of which funding has been applied for, only 28% of which has been secured. Sources of funding, either through grants, loans, revenue generation or partnership development must be sought to ensure projects are implemented according to specified timelines.

The Best Practices, forwarded in the detail of the remaining report, revolve around two central themes about which communities can organize their thinking to maximize benefits to themselves and neighboring communities. First, is the traditional Native American wisdom referred to in the NiiJii vision statement, that the interconnected nature of life is as a web, for which activities in one area, effect those in other areas. In its application, the NiiJii communities have recognized their interconnectedness to the non-Native communities surrounding them, and reached out to incorporate their neighbors' needs and desires into their sustainable development strategies and projects. The second major theme in Best Practices is the realization that, as difficult as it may be to reach total inclusion of the community, and organize community-driven grass roots initiatives, these initiatives are stronger, more sustainable and more comprehensive movements that usually lead to a maximization of benefits to the community at large over a longer term.