



**Policy Academy: Fostering Regional  
Collaboration Toward Rural Prosperity**

# Wisconsin's Policy Academy Goals

# What are we trying to do? Why now?

## Our vision:

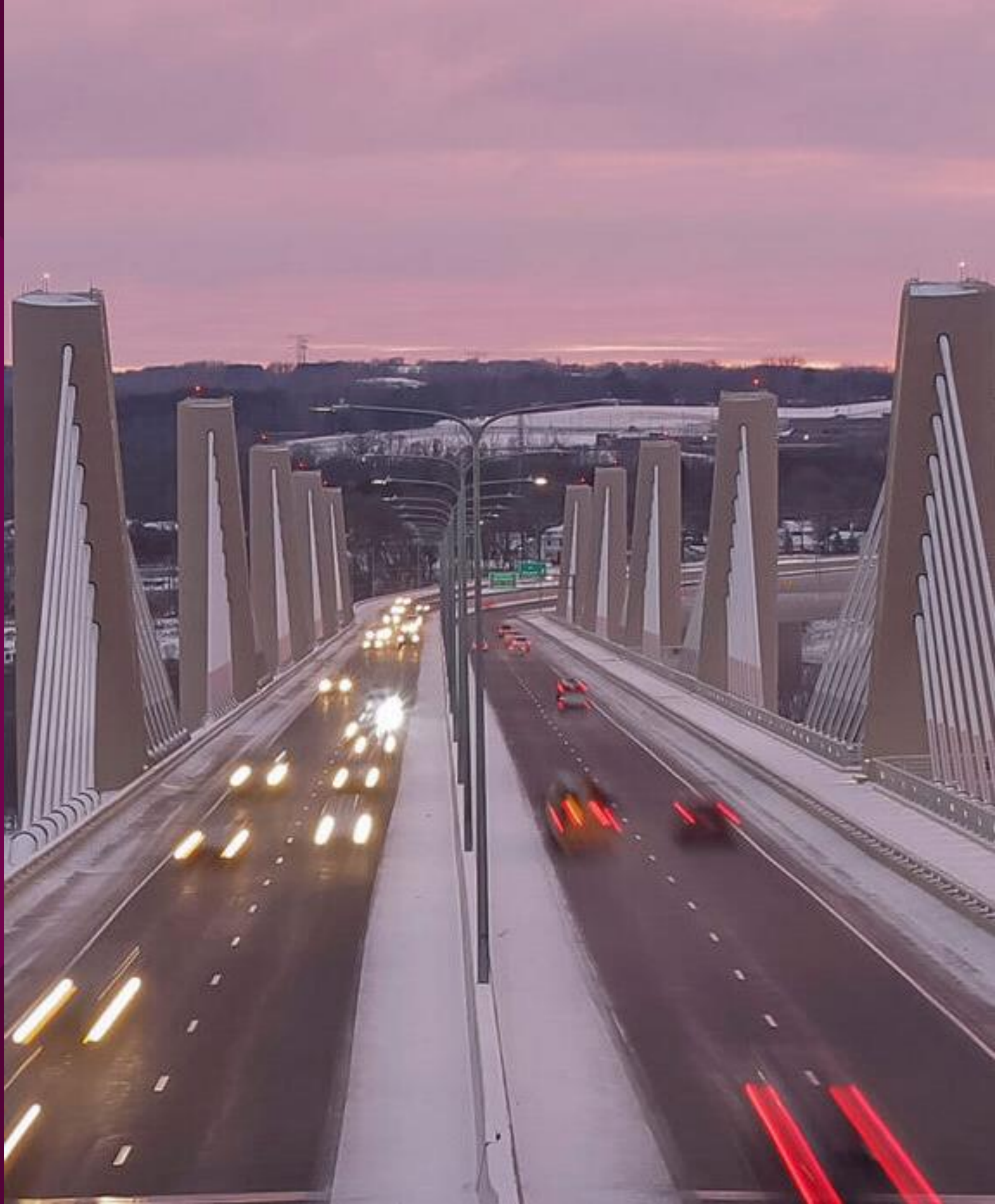
The Policy Academy is a collaborative planning process between the state, tribes, regional partners and universities that results in economic well-being for rural and tribal communities in Wisconsin.

- Establishment of the Office of Rural Prosperity
- Need to build relationships and trust
- WEDC strategic planning



Extension

University of Wisconsin-Madison



# Proposed Changes



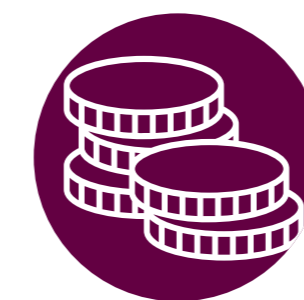
## **Regional Collaboration**

Align state, tribal and regional strategic plans toward rural prosperity.



## **Enhanced Communication Channels**

Create a feedback loop of information between regional and statewide partners.



## **Targeted Investment**

Identify collaborative projects for state and federal funding that provide focused investment toward economic well-being in rural Wisconsin.

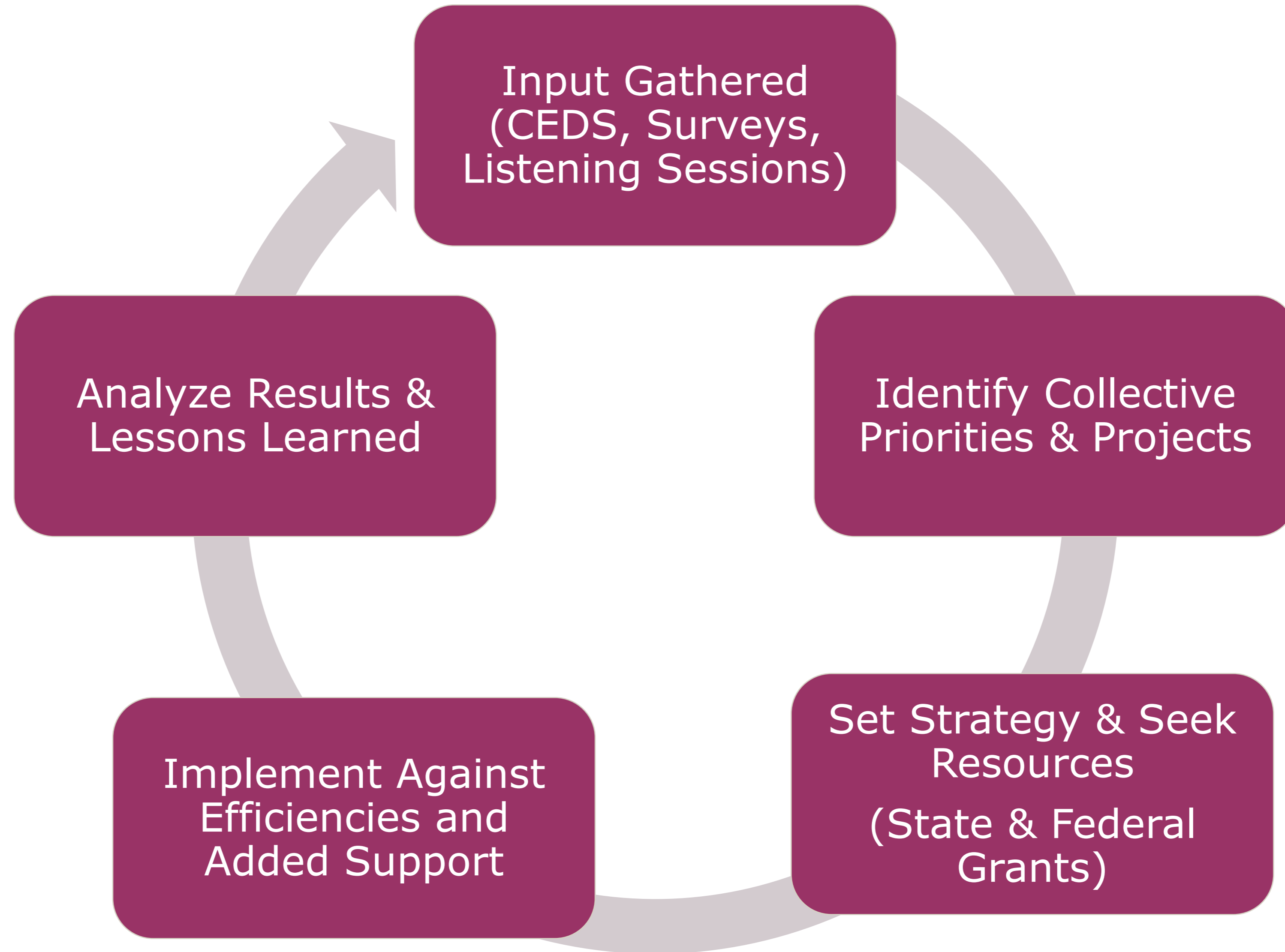


# Theory of Change

Enhancing regional collaboration toward rural prosperity.



# Feedback Loop





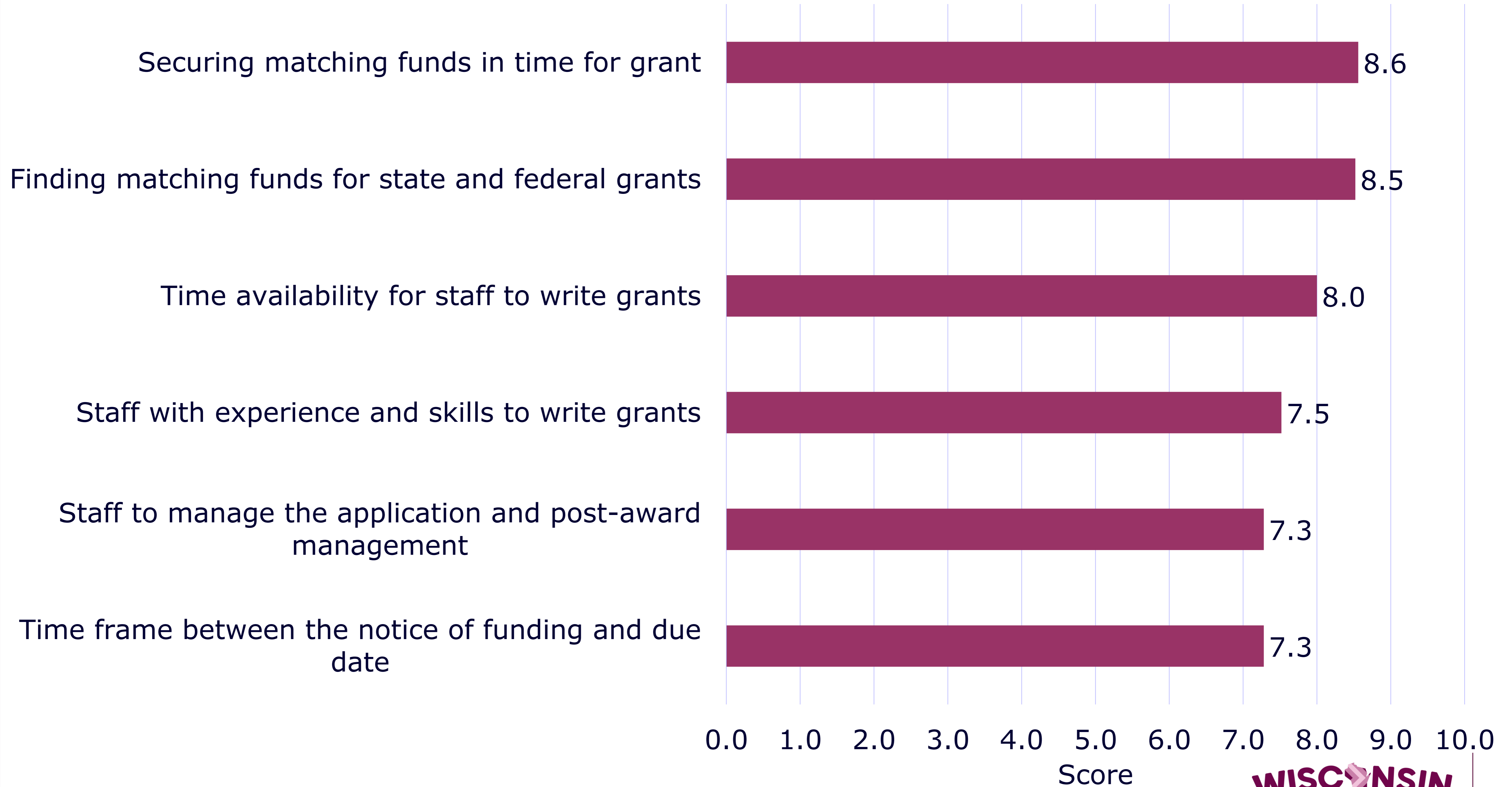
# A Year of Building Collaborative Relationships

# Academy Timeline

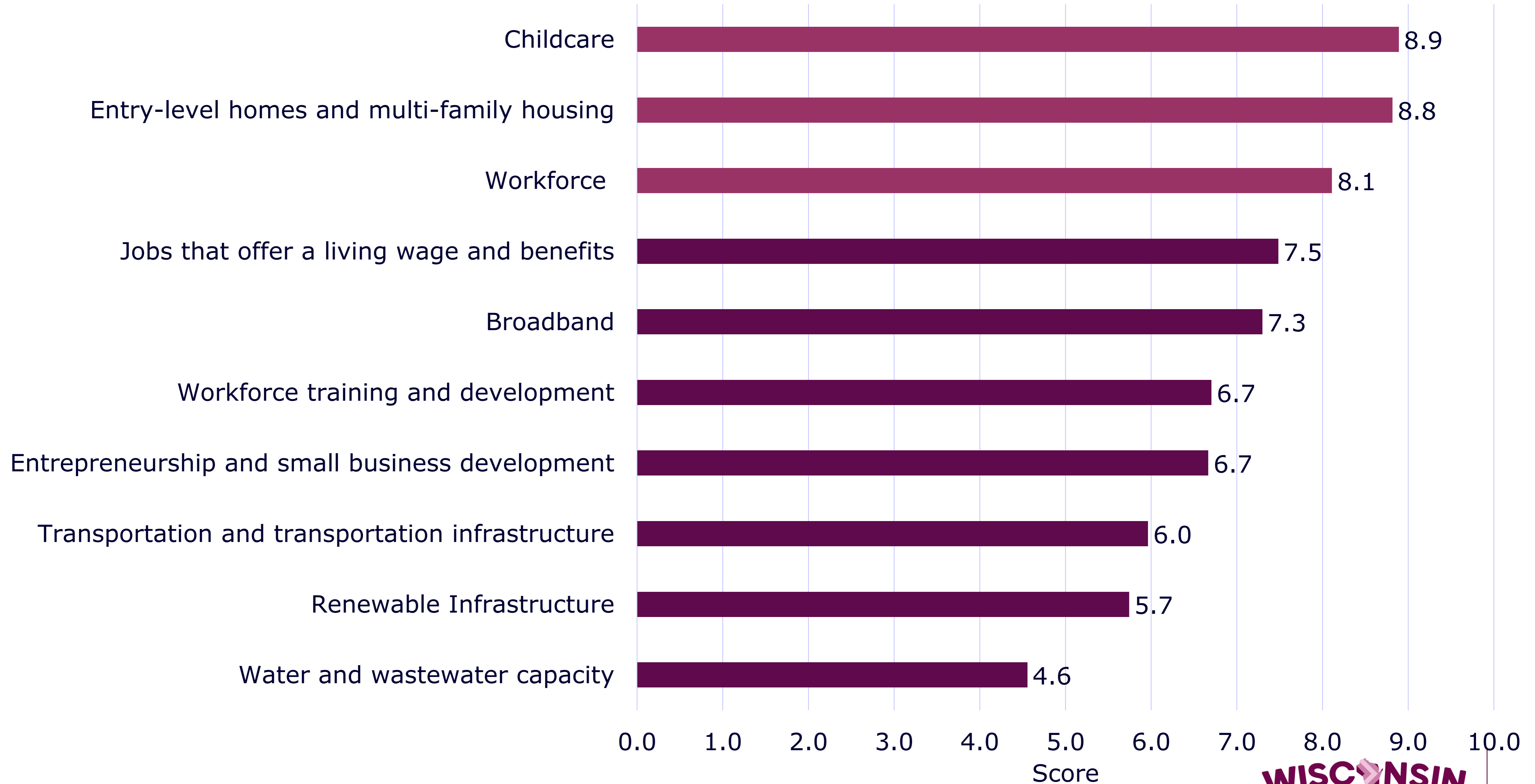




# Challenges in Applying for Funding, Averages by Challenge (1-10)



## County Project Needs, Average by Project Area (1-10)



# Priorities

Common  
Priorities



Childcare

Housing

Infrastructure/Transportation

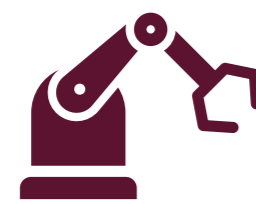
Unique Priorities



Climate Change

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Future Priorities



Artificial Intelligence

Agritourism

# Statewide Challenges Identified by Regional Partners

- AI
- Amtrak
- Broadband
- Childcare
- Climate Migration
- Demographic Shift
- EV Plan
- Housing
- Move To Regional Collaboration
- Public and higher education funding
- Renewable energy
- Revenue Sharing
- Sustainable Funding Models
- Talent Attraction
- Transportation Funding

# Tribal Nations Facilitated Engagement Discussions



Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc.

Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin

## • What are the Benefits of Strategic Alignment?

- Focuses time and effort on right tasks
- Effectively prioritizes tasks and removes conflicting priorities
- Eliminates communication silos
- Fosters team collaboration
- Builds networks
- Focuses investment
- Get other perspectives and learn more about economic development and how to connect with other tribes

## • How Can Tribes Engage in this Process?

- Need to understand what RPCs do and what is our relationship
- Leadership needs to prioritize ED to stay part of the conversation
- Market the benefits – it goes both ways
- Need some understanding of what is a partner
- Reality of a partner in it for the long haul
- Improve communication

## • What is Your Tribe Working On Now?

- Housing
- Business Diversification
- Food sovereignty
- Small business development
- Education: Leadership roles/transition planning
- Sustainable forestry
- Protecting resources: Water, Etc.
- Health care development projects

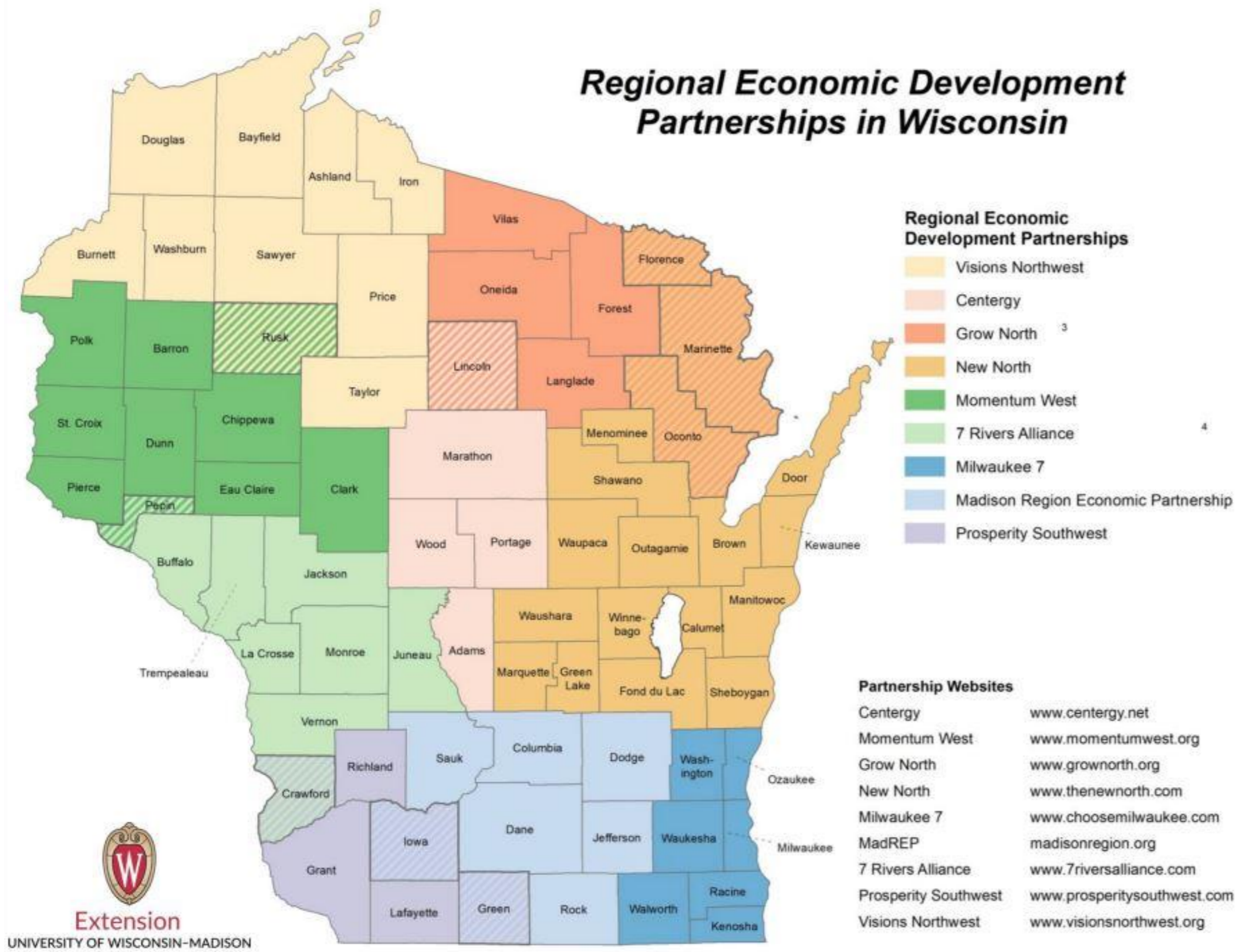
## • What Does it Take to be a Good Partner?

- Think about the other partner
- Are the values the same?
- Show real commitment
- Understand our role on the team
- Provide accountability
- Show movement forward and momentum
- Understand that work done will be for the whole community and not just for each of us

# Regional Alignment in Wisconsin: Challenges and Opportunities

# Regional Alignment - A statewide challenge

## WEDC REDOs

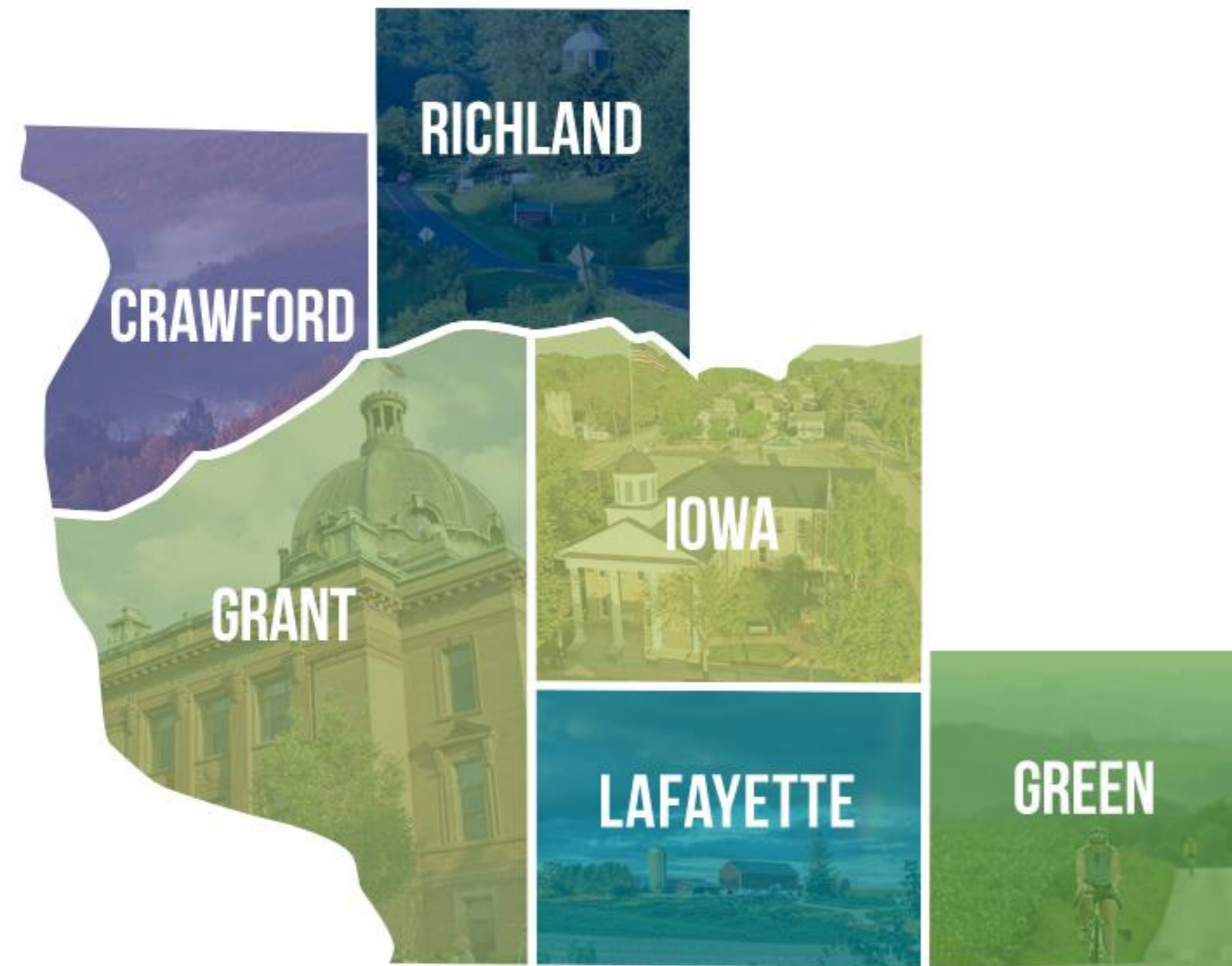


## EDA EDDs / RPCs

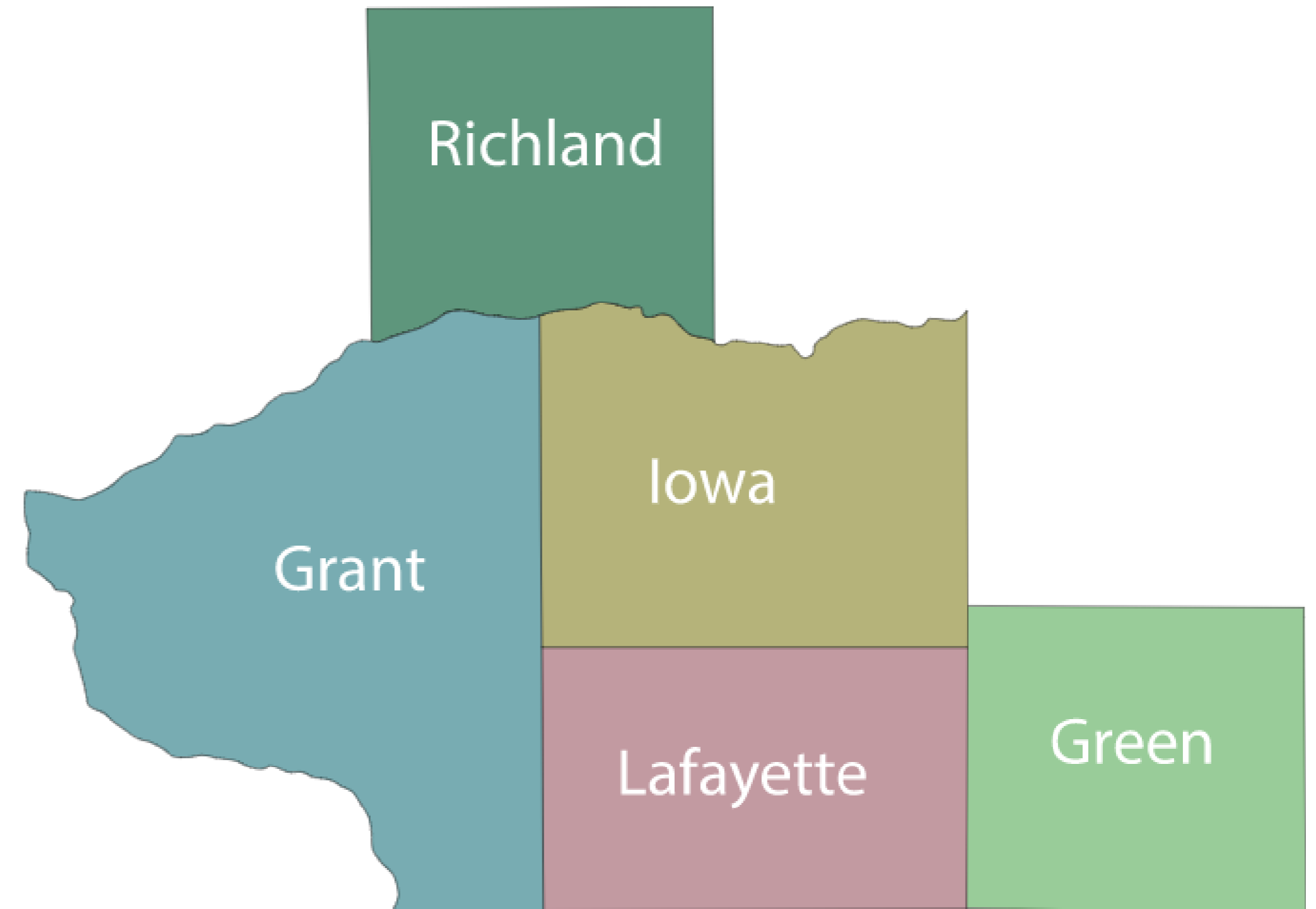


# Geographic Misalignment

## PSW



## SWWRPC





# Finding Unique Value – October 22



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○ Finding a unique value proposition usually involves a new way of segmenting the market

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○ A novel value proposition often expands the market

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# Overlapping Value

## Services

- REDO: BRE, site selection, RFIs, direct business relationships
- RPC / EDD: data/mapping, planning, grant writing / admin, project-based business engagement

## Customers

- REDO: Businesses, EDOs
- RPC / EDD: Local governments, businesses (through programs), EDOs

## Revenue

- REDO: KSP funding, donations, some grants
- RPC / EDD: county levies, contracts, grants

# Recommendations

- Encourage more collaboration between REDO, RPCs, Tribes, and the State
- Formalize relationships through board membership, MOUs, and ongoing strategic conversations
- Work to reduce administrative duties and identify efficiencies
- Track CEDs projects that WEDC funds through our investments and incentivize when possible
- Provide strategic investment to RPCs/EDDs that complement REDO services

# Implementing & Sustaining Regional Collaboration Statewide

# Rural Voices Report Recommendations

- **Continue efforts to make the needs and priorities of rural communities and Native Nations a forethought, rather than an afterthought.** Rural and tribal communities' needs should be considered in the design and implementation of state programs. There should be a government-wide commitment to apply an eye towards how well existing and latest programs work or will work in rural regions.
- **Ensure rural places and Native Nations in rural Wisconsin get a fair chance in accessing state and federal resources.** Examples of creative, responsive solutions might include rural-specific program set- asides; strengthening regional councils and regional capacity to collaborate; help with writing applications for grants, loans, and other assistance; and direct technical assistance to communities, counties, and Native Nations.
- **Look beyond Wisconsin's borders for innovative ideas.** Understand how other states across the country organize and prioritize their work in rural regions and with Native Nations. When model policies, programs or practices are realizing positive results for rural people, communities, institutions, and firms in other rural regions, bring them—and adapt them—to Wisconsin.
- **Rebalance state business incentives to ensure economic development prioritizes the assets of Wisconsin people, communities, and businesses.** Help foster local and regional development strategies and implementation in rural Wisconsin and in the Native Nations within Wisconsin's borders. In practice, this means that tax incentives for business attraction would support development and expansion of existing businesses, entrepreneurship, Main Street revitalization, childcare, broadband, transportation, and other investments essential to creating strong, thriving communities.

# Thrive Rural Wisconsin Overview

- Providing technical and financial assistance to 10 rural Wisconsin communities between February 2024- November 2025
- Encouraging local and regional collaboration and connecting communities to experts and resources
- Filling a gap with predevelopment support to get projects ready to apply for state and federal funding with a goal of leveraging \$3-\$5 million in support for projects in Thrive Rural Wisconsin communities. Communities are eligible to apply for up to \$25,000 per year for two years through this program for capacity building funds.
- Engaging communities in a work plan process to build capacity for project implementation, providing 1:1 coaching and resource navigation, advising on grant proposals, facilitating trainings, and developing toolkits

# Quarterly Regional Strategy Sessions

Purpose: Convene stakeholders for strategic conversations around common priorities and regional alignment.

- January/February: WEDA Governor's Conference on Economic Development
- April/May: Wisconsin Rural Partners Annual Summit
- July: State Convened Interagency Meeting
- September/October: WEDC Economic Summit

# Rural Communities of Practice

Purpose: Convene rural practitioners and regional partners around key priority issues identified in the Policy Academy process

- Housing
- Small Business
- Sustainable Energy Projects/Infrastructure
- Childcare
- Workforce Development



CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES TO ADVANCE COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS TOWARD ECONOMIC WELL BEING.



# Elements of the Community of Practice



Identify action-oriented local, regional and statewide stakeholders in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Develop synergies for collective goals and supportive practices.

Facilitated resource sharing, connections to technical experts, and opportunities for peer learning and workshopping projects and ideas.

Environment encourages learning and cooperation and broadens local networks to reduce isolation.

Convening leads to the identification and implementation of specific actions that create new knowledge, solve for problems, or advance projects within that issue area.

Transformational goals and metrics are identified to measure longitudinal success toward economic well-being.

Questions?



# CO | ALIGN

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Final Presentation - Colorado Delegation

FEBRUARY 15, 2024



# BACKGROUND COLORADO

- Growing need for a unified economic development voice for Colorado.
- In final stages of announcing Colorado's first statewide CEDS.
- Finding alignment of economic development strategies, reduce redundancies, and build capacity.
- Colorado's economic development efforts has always been a grass-roots effort unlike many states in the nation.





Colorado Association of Regional Organizations





**vision**

2026

# COLORADO VISION STATEMENT

Establish and promote a framework between EDD's, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and other key workforce and economic development stakeholders to guide enhanced communication, collaboration, and alignment of economic development strategies and actions within Colorado.

# COLORADO VICTORY STATEMENT

Ideally, the regional CEDS advises the state CEDS to better align strategies and inform program development. A shared framework would exist across the state and regions with ongoing two-way communication and awareness across both workforce and economic development players. This framework would serve as a critical touchpoint for legislation affecting local economic development and create a model for other states to emulate.



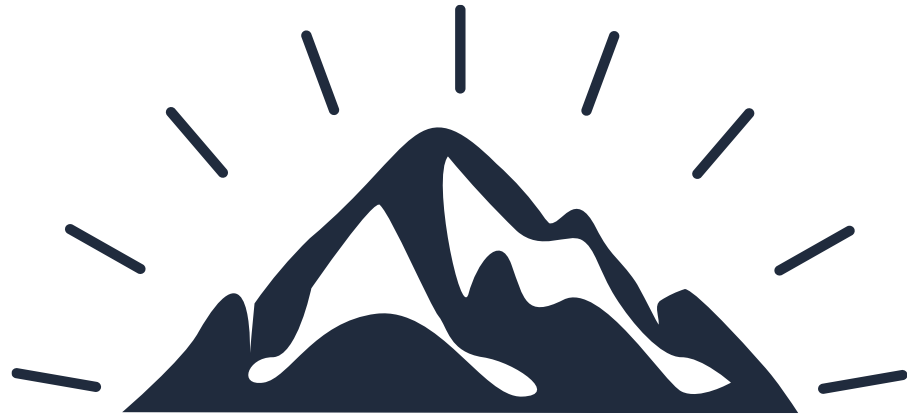
**victory**

2026





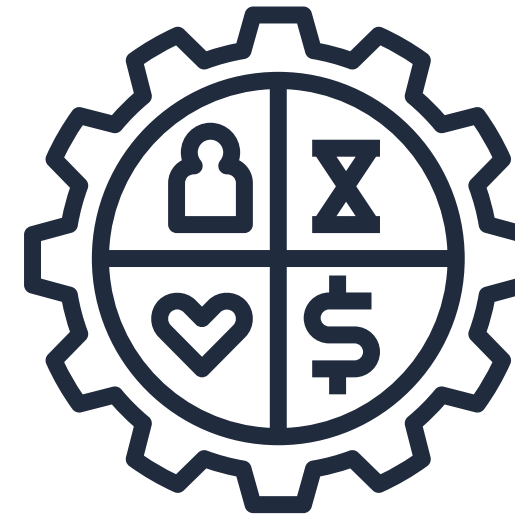
# WORKING COMMITTEES



**Communications  
Committee**



**Memorandum  
Committee**



**Resource  
Committee**



# ACTION PLAN



## 01

Develop an internal and external communication strategy including network mapping to leverage existing relationships.

## 03

Identify resources needed to amplify and sustain these efforts for now and well into the future.

## 02

Develop an MOU between statewide organizations to identify and leverage strengths, create efficiencies, and increase collaboration.

## 04

Identify next steps after the Policy Academy:

- Celebrate the work that has been done so far by announcing phase 2 of this initiative.
- Enhance the new brand CO | Align.
- Secure Visible Network Labs to identify all the players in the ecosystem.
- Build consensus among top state cabinet leadership.
- Secure funding for one FTE to help drive the objectives and activities of the strategy.
- Core/Home Teams establish meeting cadence to carry out the objectives and activities set forth by the Home Team.

# CO | Align Timeline



DC in-person meeting: Core Team established a vision and mission to bring back to the Home Team.



Gathered the Home Team for a one-day strategic planning session with our facilitators in July. During this session we worked to refine the vision and victory statement; developed three working sub-committees and established a meeting cadence.



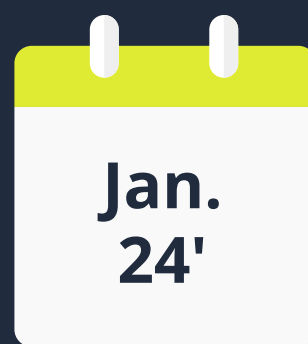
The sub-committees met bi-weekly and reported to the Home Team on the subsequent Fridays.



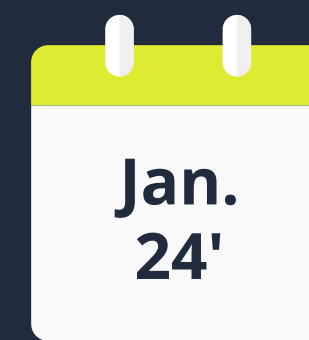
Facilitators joined and presented with the Core and Home Teams for CO's Annual Economic Development Conference. An official announcement & joint press release ["Powering Progress: A New Era of Economic Development,"](#) began marketing efforts for the initiative.



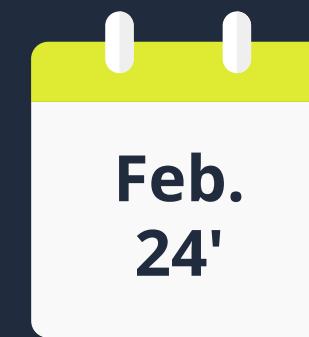
Core and Home Teams participated in a re-branding exercise to develop a new name and logo for the initiative.



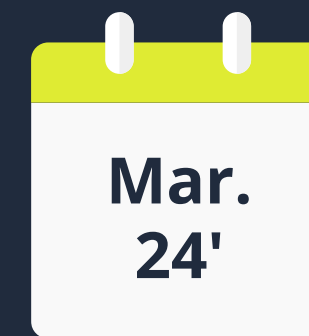
Working through a contractual agreement to begin work with Visible Network Labs to help us identify the Economic Development ecosystem in CO.



Final report completed in coordination with Core and Home Teams, to close out phase 1 of the initiative. Established a monthly meeting cadence for phase 2.



Present to CREC community. Invite all key stakeholders and state leadership to the presentation to kick off discussions at the state cabinets to begin to onboard the initiative.



Secure contract with Visible Network Labs and begin project to identify Colorado's #EconDev ecosystem.



Establish an MOU among key state #EconDev leadership; celebrate one-year anniversary of accomplishments.

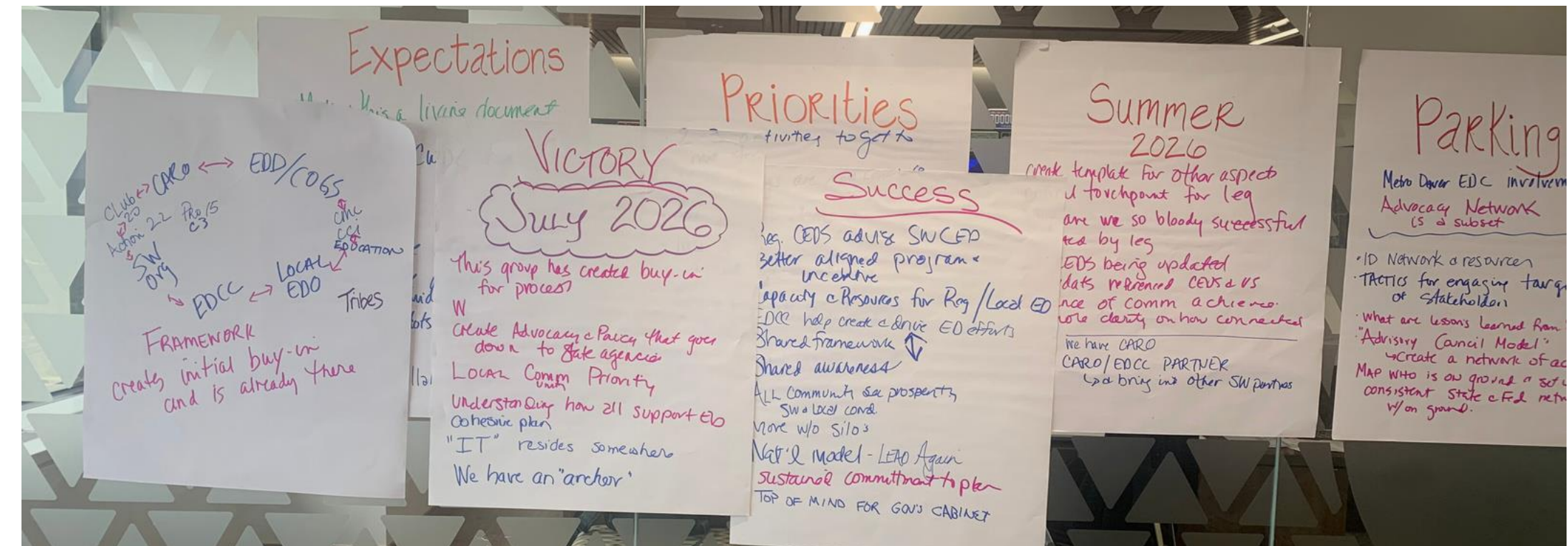
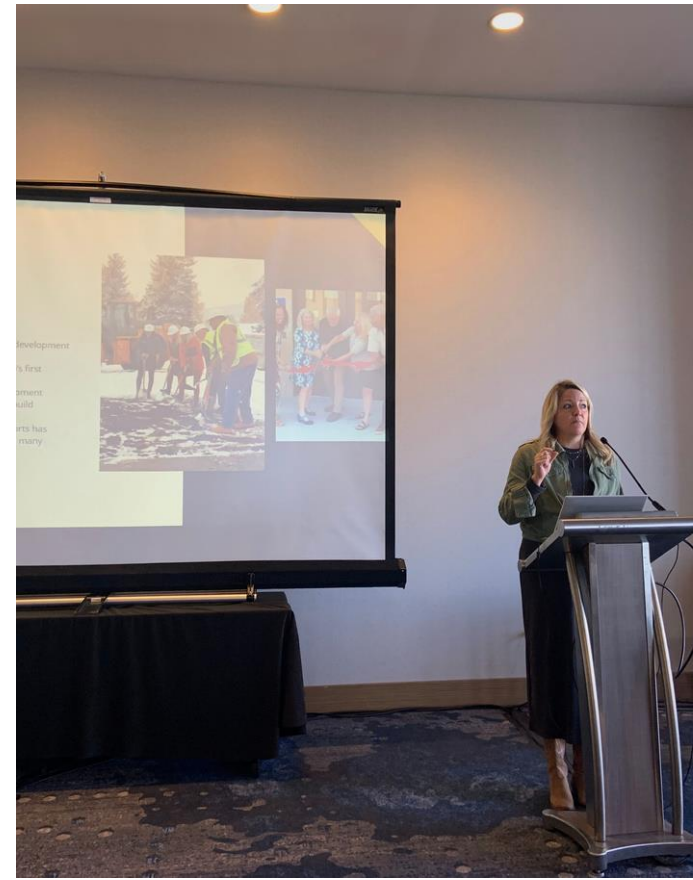
# OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES

- Time commitment.
- Commencement of the HOME Team hurdles.
- Clearly defining the outcome we were trying to be achieve.
- Clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the HOME Team.
- Getting leadership to the table.



A skier is captured in mid-air, performing a jump. The skier is wearing a dark blue jacket with orange accents, dark pants, and a headband. They are holding two ski poles high above their head. Their skis are red and are positioned vertically. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The text "lessons learned..." is overlaid in white, centered horizontally across the middle of the image.

lessons learned...





# POWERING SUSTAINABILITY

- Establish a meeting cadence for the CORE and HOME Teams to initiate phase 2 of the CO|Align initiative.
- Create messaging that resonates with the economic development ecosystem that initiates broad involvement in the CO|Align initiative.
- Create nomenclature for the various groups who contribute to the overall ecosystem to clarify their roles and responsibilities. This will then help identify where they each fit into the economic development process, programs, and policies.
- Establish an inclusive MOU for economic development stakeholders to easily participate in the CO|Align initiative.
- Use CEDS as alignment tool to guide messaging and MOU language.
- Secure contract with Visible Network Labs and begin mapping the ecosystem.
- Foster geographic coverage throughout the state, recognizing both the commonalities and differences within and between urban, suburban, rural and tribal regions in Colorado.
- Identify funding sources to secure one FTE that will champion this initiative and create a long-term sustainability strategy.
- Celebrate and enjoy our progress as we move forward with the initiative and to be sure we share the progress to the larger stakeholder audience.



# CO | ALIGN

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# KANSAS

## COMMERCE



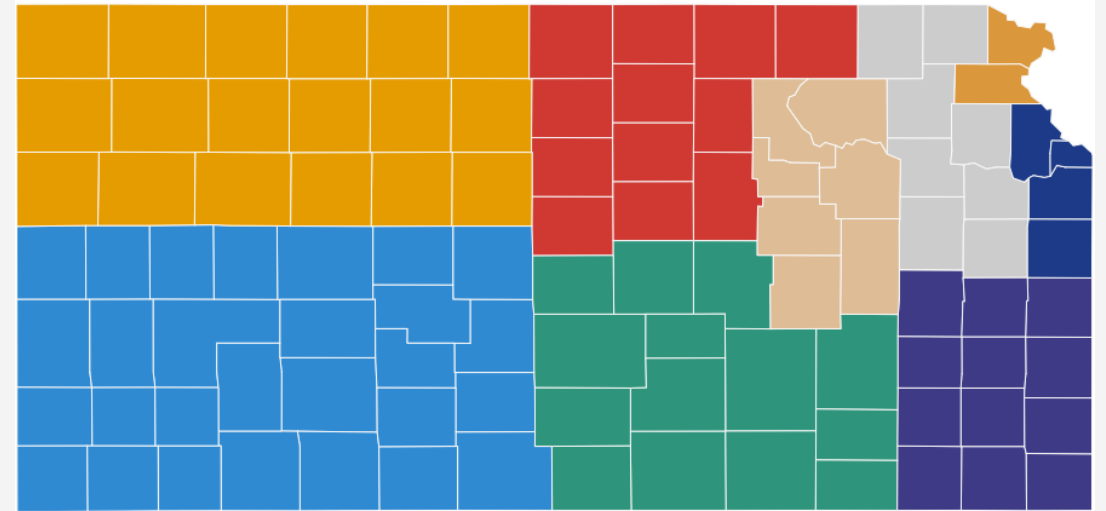
[www.kansascommerce.gov](http://www.kansascommerce.gov)

# Background / Operating Environment

- Overall goal – foster collaboration, bridge the perceived divide between urban and rural areas, and establish a stronger, more unified economic development strategy for the state
- Factors that drove the submission of the EDA Policy Academy Application
  - Lack of collaboration
  - Geographic differences between EDDs
  - Perceived neglect
  - Complexity in service coordination
  - Population distribution

## Economic Development Districts

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are multi-jurisdictional entities, commonly composed of multiple counties and in certain cases even cross-state borders. They help lead the locally-based, regionally driven economic development planning process that leverages the involvement of the public, private and non-profit sectors to establish a strategic blueprint (i.e., an economic development roadmap) for regional collaboration.



# Core Team Members



- Matt Godinez
  - Assistant Secretary of Quality Places, Kansas Department of Commerce (KDC)
- Jeff Tucker
  - Executive Director, Technology Development Institute (TDI), Kansas State University
- Kayla Savage
  - Director of Community Engagement, KDC
- Brandon Hutton
  - Director of Advanced Technology, KDC
- Stephanie Marsh
  - Grant Team Manager, South Central Economic Development District (SCKEDD)

# Action Plan

- Goal 1: Rebuilding relationships with EDDs
  - Conduct relationship assessment
  - Facilitate collaborative workshops
  - Establish relationship liaisons
  - Implement joint initiatives
- Goal 2: Create stronger communication channels for EDDs
  - Develop a KDC grant calendar
  - Frequent in-person and virtual meetings
  - Utilize digital platforms
- Goal 3: Build internal capacity within KDC
  - Recruitment of a Sector Development Specialist
  - Integrate this work within the Office of Innovation
  - Regular review and adaptation



# Obstacle and Challenges



- Goal 1: Rebuilding relationships with EDDs
  - Programmatic changes causing turbulence
  - Ensuring that voices are listened to and heard
- Goal 2: Create stronger communication channels for EDDs
  - Proactive approach to grant deadlines from KDC
  - Planning more frequent meetings and “pulse checks”
  - Utilizing different communication tools
- Goal 3: Build internal capacity within KDC
  - Addition of a key role – Sector Development Specialist
  - Housing the work from the academy within the Office of Innovation



# Lessons Learned

- No “one-size-fits-all” approach to working with EDDs
  - Collecting information from each EDD individually will help with developing supporting resources targeted to their specific needs
- Intentionality with relationship building
  - To move forward cohesively, parties need to be in alignment with how to continue growing
- This is a living process that will have it’s struggles
  - Work together to navigate challenges – it’s Kansas vs. the issue!



# Sustainability



- Housing the “spirit” of this work within a job role at KDC
  - This ensures that the work is supported by housing it within an FTE
- Aligning the KDC Office of Innovation with the vision of the EDA Policy Academy and how it fits within the ED ecosystem
  - Continues the work of the Framework for Growth
- Empowering EDDs
  - Through targeted technical assistance, resources, and innovative economic development initiatives



# Future Thinking...

- Continued discussions on restarting/reviving a state-wide economic development organization (KARDO)
- How this work can impact future Framework for Growth updates
- Developing of internal process for project tracking around supporting EDDs





# Also...





**KANSAS**

**COMMERCE**