

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES REFLECTION TOOLKIT

**Adapted from Strengthen ND's Big Rural Brainstorm workbook.*



***"How might
we cultivate
resilient
communities
in North
Dakota?"***

In the spring of 2020, North Dakotans were hit with the stark reality that the COVID-19 pandemic would greatly impact not just the economic status of major industries across our state but also our small towns. The team at Strengthen ND realized that all in North Dakota were going to have to flex our resilience muscles to build our communities and state back to a better place. This sparked a question for our organization:

"How might we cultivate resilient communities in North Dakota?"

To better answer this question, we got to work identifying communities that we considered to be resilient in North Dakota and their common characteristics. Throughout this reflection toolkit, you will find the three characteristics our team identified and associated tools to review, consider, and implement to support your community in its resilience efforts. We invite you to share them, adapt them, and reach out to us for support.

Sincerely,
Strengthen ND Team

Definition:

"Better able to prepare, adapt, and get stronger in response to internal and external pressures and stresses, in ways that not only allow people, businesses, neighborhoods, and the whole community to maintain essential functions and bounce back relatively quickly, but also to bounce forward toward an improved environment, social, and economic health and wellbeing."



What do resilient North Dakota communities look like?

Three common characteristics:

1. Strong champions with an eye to the future;
2. Deep sense of pride and identity; and
3. Willingness to work together as a community to get things done.

Strong Champions with an Eye to the Future

When assessing the resilience of communities, the strength of the community's leadership cannot be ignored. When working throughout rural North Dakota and its many communities and groups, we have found that strong community champions build lasting initiatives. Most often, effective and resilient leadership groups have five elements in common:

1. Big Vision
2. Diverse Thoughts Represented
3. Simple Structure
4. Defined Action Plan
5. Culture of Learning & Transparency

Big Vision

Leaders within the community have a big vision for moving their community forward and - most importantly - they COMMUNICATE that vision in a way that supports buy-in. It is difficult to get individuals to go on the leadership journey with you, especially if they don't know where you're going.

Diverse Thoughts Represented

The most effective leadership groups are representative of their communities. They are inclusive of different ways of thinking, sectors, gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and ideology. Engaging those who see the world differently creates richer discussion and - ultimately - better outcomes.

Simple Structure

Many leaders in rural communities resist complex leadership structure and rightly so. We do, however, advocate for and see to be most effective some kind of simple committee or team structure. Why? It supports accountability and lines of communication are maintained throughout the duration of the special project or initiative.

Action Plan

Resilient communities and resilient leaders support the development of a community-oriented or cause-specific action plan. The action plan does not have to be overly complicated; a listing of goals, tasks, and timelines will do. Action plans are critical tools to support accountability, internal and external community communications, and facilitates leaders to focus on the big picture, while also allowing for greater opportunity to celebrate successes when progress is made.

Culture of Learning & Transparency

When tackling big community projects and small neighborhood projects, prioritizing a leadership culture of learning and transparency is critical. The most resilient communities - those who are positive, willing to dig in to do hard work, and able to view challenges as areas of opportunity - practice a culture of learning from their mistakes, being transparent with the community at large as to what the mistakes are, and communicating how they plan to move forward. Mistakes will happen. Things won't work out the way we want them to. It is a part of life and the growth of communities. We build trust with our peers and residents when we are able to be open about that in our leadership journeys.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does leadership look like in your community? Is it inclusive? Effective?
2. How are you developing young people or encouraging them to engage in leadership?



Deep Sense of Pride and Identity

Community pride is that critical, immeasurable factor to a community's success that can make or break projects and long-term viability. You **feel** the community's pride when you speak with its residents. We have found pride to be the "it" factor to a community's success. Cultivating community pride can happen when residents and leaders have co-created a current identity and feel deeply connected to their community's roots. This is difficult work to do, but it is work worth doing. Included within this reflection toolkit, you will find Strengthen ND's Community Identity Inventory, which will support communities to identify, understand, and communicate the five elements most important to a community's culture, including: **Art, Commerce, Geography, History, and People.**

Questions for Reflection

1. What has been your community's greatest achievement? What are you known for?
2. What is unique about your community? What does your community have that others don't?
3. Do you feel like residents have a sense of community pride? Is that pride deep? Or is it fleeting?

Willingness to Work Together

We have found that having a big vision for your community isn't enough - people throughout the community have to be willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work. The most resilient communities have a "let's get it done" attitude, focused on pragmatism and celebrating incremental successes. Below are six steps that we have found to be effective for communities to think through project ideas and development project management strategies.

Community Project Planning: Six Steps to Make Projects More Successful

Clearly Define Project Need/Purpose

- Why is the project needed, and who will it serve?
- What community need will the project meet?
- Develop a minimum two-sentence description of the project.
- Who will manage the project when completed?

Community Ownership and Collaboration

- Don't "build it and they will come".
- Ask for...and listen to community input.
- Seek organizations to collaborate with - make it truly a community project.

Define Project Budget

- What will the project cost to complete?
- Develop a project expense budget.
- Include donated time, materials, and expertise in budget as both expense and revenue.
- Develop an operating budget for the project.

Fundraising Plan

- What are the local sources of support?
- Plan for local individual and business support.
- What is the potential for corporate support?
- Is it a project that provides naming opportunities? Are there grant sources for support? (Local, State, Regional)
- Develop a fundraising plan that builds local support first.
- Delegate responsibility for fundraising.

Project Management

- Who will provide fiscal management?
- Who will provide project oversight?
- Who will be the contact person for the project?
- Delegate responsibility.

Project Reporting and Evaluation

- Plan for project reporting to donors; delegate responsibility for completing final report.
- Plan for evaluation, if appropriate, by collecting data.
- Always acknowledge your donors at all levels.
- Promote your success through press releases or a special event.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there a project you'd like to see your community tackle?
2. Why this project?
3. How can we support buy-in from broad members of the community through an action plan? What does that look like?

Every town has a story to tell, but sometimes it is hard to see and appreciate what is right under your nose. Strengthen ND's Community Identity Inventory will help residents see their community with new eyes by inventorying and assessing five rural community culture elements:

- Art
- Commerce
- Geography
- History
- People

Art

North Dakota has a deep connection to arts and culture, and it can be an important source of local pride. Questions to consider when inventorying your community's art identity include:

- Do you have any public sculptures, murals, or grassroots art?
- Do you have a performing or event center, art gallery, maker space, or art museum?
- Is there a place where you can see an area artist at work?
- Is there any traditional folk art or indigenous art displayed in the community?
- Do you have a community band, symphony, or choir? Where and how often do they perform?

As you are building this inventory section, think about people, places, or events to find music, fine art, drama, literature, or dance in your town.

Commerce

Each town has a story of businesses past or present. Questions to consider when inventorying your community's commerce identity include:

- Your town was probably founded due to a certain business. What was it in your area?
- What were some of the early businesses?
- Is your town known for a certain economic sector (agriculture, oil and gas, tourism)?
- What are your specialty shops?
- What retail shops are located in historic or unique buildings?
- What type of dining options are available? Do you have locally sourced restaurants or highly sought after chains?
- Is there a story to tell about business evolution in your town? (bootleggers, railroad, etc.)

Geography

What are some of the natural aspects of your community or surrounding area that make it unique? Consider assessing elements in each of these categories:

- Natural landmarks
- Hiking, biking, or walking trails
- Lakes and rivers
- Wildlife and birds
- Hunting and fishing
- Scenic byways
- Trees, wildflowers, and gardens
- Proximity to places and other communities (i.e. Carrington is the in middle of everywhere - 2 hours from Bismarck, Grand Forks, Minot, and Fargo)

History

Outline the history of your town and look for significant details that might add spice to your story!

Questions to consider when building your community's history include:

- What significant events surrounded the founding of your town?
- What significant or infamous events made an impact on your town?
- What present-day physical evidence helps tell the story of your town?
- Utilize community historians to tell the story of the town, and listen like you are hearing it for the first time.
- Peruse old newspapers.

Use each of the rural culture elements to help you think of every aspect of your town's story.

People

The people of your community create that "special sauce" that makes each town's culture unique.

Here are some questions to help you discover the habits or cultures of the people of your town.

- What annual events do you have? Are they unique to the area?
- What are things that people do every day? What do they wear? What do they talk about? What are their values?
- What do people do for recreation?
- What are their cultural backgrounds? (Scandinavian, Native American, German-Russian, etc.)
- What are some quirky things that happen in your town that don't in others?

Community Identity Inventory Uses

It is not enough to individually complete the inventory or to "put it up on the shelf" once it has been completed. What you do AFTER you complete the inventory is what counts.

1. Determine Your Goals: After completing your inventory, it will be helpful to determine the ways in which you plan to utilize the information. For instance, the inventory may help you realize that you have a great number of historic churches in your town, a fact that you may highlight on a brochure to support local tourism. Think hard about the highlights and strong points of the inventory. You may want to use the inventory to:
 - a. Educate local citizens;
 - b. Develop a strategy to bring visitors to town; or
 - c. Develop economic and community development plans.
2. Plan How You'll Tell Your Story: Once you have gathered the information, devise a plan as to how you'll shape and share the story of your community. You could:
 - a. Develop group itineraries;
 - b. Develop a brochure for local explorers;
 - c. Develop a website and presence on social media;
 - d. Develop self-guided driving or walking tours;
 - e. Write a play or compose a song about your town;
 - f. Educate your own community through newspaper articles, window displays, or community presentations;
 - g. Create a booth to display at trade shows; or
 - h. Use your inventory to stimulate community project ideas.

Strengthen ND

Strengthen ND supports and accelerates community and economic development across rural North Dakota and the Native Nations that share its geography. If you'd like to learn more or would like help with your community initiative, please reach out!

Megan Langley, Executive Director: Megan@StrengthenND.com | (701) 303-0840
www.StrengthenND.com | 9 Main Street | PO Box 166 - Souris, ND 58783