LA CROSSE COUNTY NOTICE OF MEETING

COMMITTEE/BOARD: LA CROSSE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND, INC.

DATE OF MEETING: THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2018

MEETING PLACE: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER – ROOM 1107
212 6TH ST N, LA CROSSE, WI

TIME OF MEETING: 7:30 A.M.

PURPOSE OF MEETING:
1. Call to Order/Roll Call
2. Public Comment
3. Approve Minutes of December 7, 2017
4. Update on River Steel
5. County Demographic Data – Karl Green
6. WISE Plan Summary
7. Goal Setting for 2018-19
8. Update on County Properties
   • Lakeview Business Park
9. Agency Updates
10. Next Meeting – February 1, 2018 - 7:30 a.m.
11. Future Agenda Items
12. Adjourn

NEWS MEDIA
La Crosse Tribune
Other news media

OTHERS
Brian Fukuda
Charlie Handy
Greg Flogstad (mail)
Karl Green
Jim Hill
Jenny Kuderer
Jim Brickl
Tom Faella
Mike Herro
Teresa Schnitzler
Charley Weeth
Mayor Joe Chilsen
Mayor Tim Kabat

COUNTY DEPARTMENTS
County Board Chair
County Administrator
County Clerk

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Tara Johnson, President
Sharon Hampson, Vice President
Sharon Davidson, Secretary/Treasurer
Gibran Augustine
Patti Balacek
Megan DeVore
Mike Giese
Dave Holtze
Debra McKenney
Joe Moua
Matt Nikolay
Steve O’Malley
Laurie Miller
Tina Wehrs
John Wettstein

MEMBERS: NEED A QUORUM TO CONDUCT BUSINESS If unable to attend, call County Board Chair Office at 785-9563.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: If you need accommodation to attend this meeting, please contact County Board Chair Office at 785-9563 as soon as possible.

DATE NOTICE POSTED: January 2, 2017

This meeting may be recorded and any such recording is subject to Disclosure under the Wisconsin Open Records Law
CALL TO ORDER
Chair Johnson called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. Joe Moua was introduced as the new member to the La Crosse County Economic Development Fund.

PUBLIC COMMENT
There was no public comment.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 2, 2017 LA CROSSE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND, INC.
MOTION by Giese/Holtze to approve the minutes of the November 2, 2017 La Crosse County Economic Development Fund, Inc. Motion carried unanimously; Hampson, Balacek, DeVore, O’Malley, Miller and Wehrs excused.

REPORT ON 2018 BUDGET APPROVAL
Brian Fukuda reported that the County Board approved the 2018 budget for the County. Therefore, the economic development portion of the budget was also approved, as was recommended at the last EDF meeting. There was discussion at both the Executive Committee and the County Board regarding memberships and contributions to partner organizations.

OFFER TO PURCHASE 3 ACRES IN LAKEVIEW BUSINESS PARK
We have received an offer to purchase a 3 acre parcel in the Lakeview Business Park.

As landowners, La Crosse County staff negotiates with potential developers in the Lakeview Business Park. We have an offer to purchase that was countered, and then the potential developer countered back. The price has already been set for the land in the park. There are certain requirements in the covenants, such as potential for investment, coverage ratio on the land, requirements for building style and appearance, etc. that need to be met. The Park Development Review Board will review the plans to make sure they fit into the Park.

CLOSED SESSION: MOTION by Holtze/McKenney to go into closed session at 7:44 a.m. for the purpose of considering financial histories of specific persons which, if discussed in public, would be likely to have a substantial adverse effect upon the reputation of any person referred to, pursuant to Wis. Stats. 19.85(1)(f) TO WIT: Offer to Purchase 3 Acres in Lakeview Business Park.

MOTION by O’Malley/Holtze to return into open session at 8:20 a.m. Motion carried unanimously; Hampson, Balacek, DeVore, Miller and Wehrs excused.
The following was reported from Closed Session: The EDF Committee voted unanimously to give direction to staff to continue negotiations on the land purchase offer of 3 acres in the Lakeview Business Park.

REVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND GOALS AND PROJECTS
Brian distributed the La Crosse County EDF goals.

**Big picture goals:**
- Encourage targeted job growth and support workforce attraction, retention and development
- Support tax base creation and assist in the elimination of blight
- Contribute to better housing opportunities, neighborhoods and quality of life
- Work toward greater efficiency of public services through collaboration

**Priorities:**
- Develop, manage, and promote appropriate business and development assistance/incentive programs
- Promote and support entrepreneurship
- Perform meaningful, effective business outreach
- Promote land use and transportation policy links
- Inventory and promote development opportunities
- Develop County-owned properties to highest and best use while working to fill gaps in the market
- Assist in the development of other (municipal and private) properties
- Work with regional partners to study and provide public and board education on new trends and demographics, and maintain meaningful economic indicators
- Provide support for area non-profit organization that assist in meeting our big picture goals
- Market the benefits and opportunities of La Crosse County, and promote public awareness of economic development in our community.

This will go back on the EDF agenda in January for discussion and make edits, revisions or add new goals. Staff will add a component for outcomes or indicators. We will also discuss the structure of future EDF committee meetings, such as bringing in our economic partners each month for an overview of their projects.

**UPDATE ON COUNTY PROPERTIES**
- Lakeview Business Park – The Park Development Review Board has met to review, and has approved the plans for Wisconsin Lift Truck. We expect to close soon on that three acre parcel.

**AGENCY UPDATES:**
- Greg Flogstad noted that the MRRPC bimonthly meeting is December 13th where 9 counties will come together to discuss solid biomass as an economic development resource.
- Jim Hill noted that the LADCO Annual meeting is December 21st at the Radisson Ballroom. Award recipients will be introduced; Governor Walker is the key note speaker.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**
- Planning Process - January

**NEXT MEETING** – January 4, 2018 at 7:30 a.m.
ADJOURN
There being no further business, MOTION by Nikolay/McKenney to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 a.m. **Motion carried unanimously**; Hampson, Balacek, DeVore, Miller and Wehrs excused.

The above minutes may be approved, amended or corrected at the next Committee meeting.

Terri Pavlic, Recorder
#4 – Update on River Steel
Megan will provide a brief update on the status of our loans to River Steel. There was a hearing on the bank’s foreclosure toward the end of December.

#5 – County Demographic Data – Karl Green
Karl Green will present some demographic data on La Crosse County, which was part of UW-Extension’s State Civil Rights review. Attached are the slides that Karl will review.

#6 – 7 Rivers Alliance WISE Plan Summary
The 7 Rivers Alliance recently wrapped up the Workforce Innovation for a Strong Economy (WISE) Plan. Attached is a summary of the plan that we will discuss at the meeting. Workforce has become a key concern for many businesses in the region, so this plan lays out regional strategies to prepare, attract, and retain workforce.

Please also see this column by Chris Hardie about the WISE Plan –
http://lacrossetribune.com/opinion/columnists/chris-hardie-let-s-get-wise-on-workforce-recruitment/article_5118d42b-32f7-5ce3-b5a9-85b0e7fe556c.html

#7 – Goal Setting for 2018-19
We will continue our discussion from last month regarding goal setting for 2018-19. Please spend some time before the meeting thinking about what you would like to see us accomplish in the next two years. We will go around the room and ask you to share a “headline” that you hope to see regarding economic development in La Crosse County in the next year or two.

The strength of this Board is the diversity in backgrounds and areas of interest, so we hope that everyone will contribute their unique perspective to this conversation.

#8 – Update on County Properties
- Lakeview Business Park – We continue to move forward with negotiations on the two parcels in the business park, and hope to close soon on them both.

#9 – Agency Updates –
Any partner organizations in attendance will provide brief updates on upcoming events and projects.
La Crosse County Population by Age & Sex, 2010 & 2020

Population Change, 2000-2010:
La Crosse County, Southwest Region and Wisconsin
**Racial/Ethnicity Maps**

**Asian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>2016 Population</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangor town</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangor village</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barre town</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns town</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell town</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmington town</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield town</td>
<td>2,116</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hamilton town</td>
<td>2,467</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Washington town</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Salem village</td>
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<td><strong>5,303</strong></td>
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Population taken from 2016 ACS estimate.
RACIAL/ETHNICITY MAPS

HISPANIC

<table>
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<th>Municipality</th>
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<th>Hispanic or Latino (of any race) %</th>
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<td>48.7%</td>
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<td>15.2%</td>
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<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell town</td>
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<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmington town</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greenfield town</td>
<td>2,116</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
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<td>Holland town</td>
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<td>1,100 2.1%</td>
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<td>21.0%</td>
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<td>63.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rockland village</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelby town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington town</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Salem village</td>
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<td>89.1%</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,017</strong></td>
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RACIAL/ETHNICITY MAPS

AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK

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<th>2016 Population</th>
<th>Black or African American %</th>
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<td>Bangor village</td>
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<td>11.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Campbell town</td>
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<td>Holmen village</td>
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<td>19.0%</td>
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<td>1,205 2.3%</td>
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<td>280.1%</td>
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<td>63.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rockland village</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby town</td>
<td>4,707</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington town</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Salem village</td>
<td>4,956</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,637</strong></td>
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### Racial/Ethnicity Maps

#### Native American

<table>
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<th>%</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Farmington town</td>
<td>2,083</td>
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<td>0.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greenfield town</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>Onalaska city</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onalaska town</td>
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<td>0.7%</td>
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<td>Rockland village</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelby town</td>
<td>4,707</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington town</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Salem village</td>
<td>4,956</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>491</strong></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

La Crosse County UW-Extension Profile

Prepared by Dan Veroff
Applied Population Lab, UW-Madison/Extension

1/2/2018

*not including two or more races*
COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY DIVERSITY

UW-LA CROSSE ENROLLMENT 2017
RACIAL AND ETHNIC POPULATION

- African American: 0.79%
- American Indian: 0.19%
- Hispanic: 3.22%
- Native Hawaiian: 0.03%
- Other Asian: 1.01%
- Southeast Asian: 1.34%
- Two or more races: 2.58%
- International: 1.46%
- Unknown: 1.46%
- White: 89.48%

Language Spoken at Home for Persons Age 5 and Over, ACS 2015

- English: 91.50%
- Spanish: 2.70%
- Other: 8.34%
La Crosse County UW-Extension Profile

Unemployment Rates 2006-2017

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<th>Wisconsin</th>
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<td>2.9%</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>7.8%</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>4.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>4.6%</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
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Poverty by Race and Ethnicity, 2011-2015 American Community Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>White alone</th>
<th>Black alone</th>
<th>American Indian alone</th>
<th>Asian alone</th>
<th>Two or more Races</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>17,482</td>
<td>14,800</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>1,146</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% is of subgroup population – totals of actual numbers reported next to the color bar.
Homeownership by Race & Ethnicity, ACS 2011-2015
La Crosse County

GRACIAS! Ua tsaug! Thank You!
The 7 Rivers Alliance would like to thank the following partners for their contribution to this project

Primary Funders

EDA
U.S. Economic Development Administration

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

Supporting Funders

County of La Crosse, Wisconsin

Western Technical College

Mayo Clinic Health System

Alliant Energy

Manpower

Express Employment Professionals

I+S Group

Minnesota State College Southeast

Dairyland Power Cooperative

Gundersen Health System

PeopleFirst HR Solutions
We would like to thank The 7 Rivers Alliance Board of Directors and the WISE Plan Steering Committee for their support and participation in the creation of this plan.

Board of Directors

Michael Richards, President
Gundersen Health System

Dorothy Duran, Vice President
Minnesota State SE Technical College

Brian Fukuda, Secretary
La Crosse County

Clinton Torp, Treasurer
La Crosse Regional Airport

WISE Plan Steering Committee

Terry Pickett  Patti Balacek
Beth Sullivan  Wendy MIm-Herrold
Mike Haney  Grace Jones
Fern Rissmore  Mary Kay Wolfe
Jason Gilman  Kahya Fox
Brian Fukuda  Todd Mandel
Steve Peterson  Dale Darrow
Steve Sarvi  Eric Hartwig
Greg Flogstad  Audra Weiser
Rachelle Howe  Peter Fletcher
Vicki Markussen  Kyle Bakkum
Chris Hardie  Fatima Said
Jenny Kuderer  Terry Whipple

We would like to recognize our staff for their contributions to this report
Chin-Chin Minniear, Lisa Herr, Chris Hardie, Hayley Mosson, Lacey Skoyen, and Gabe Nelson
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  Talent Retention ......................................................................................................................................... 9

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This work was made possible thanks to the generous support of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), and the 7 Rivers Alliance & Regional Partners. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or recommendations of EDA or WEDC.
Executive Summary

The Workforce Innovation for a Strong Economy (WISE) Plan is the culmination of a nearly yearlong effort to understand and address the workforce preparation, retention and recruitment challenges faced by businesses and communities across the 7 Rivers Alliance Region.

Through a series of interviews, working group sessions, subject matter forums and significant economic research, the WISE Plan workforce gap analysis revealed that the 7 Rivers Region needs to attract and retain 1,500-2,000 more workers each year during the next decade to keep up with employer demand.

This is a daunting challenge, but the WISE Talent Plan outlines strategies for tackling these overarching issues, and identifies champions who can lead efforts to improve Talent Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention prospects throughout the region.

The region covers 14 counties across Southwest Wisconsin, Southeast Minnesota, and Northeast Iowa, a predominantly rural area with two urban centers in La Crosse, WI and Winona, MN. And for the purposes of this study, we included Pierce County in Wisconsin and Fayette County in Iowa. The development of the WISE Plan included involvement from more than 500 business and community leaders during 28 small group interviews, three talent working group sessions, six subject matter forums, four Steering Committee working sessions and research. Interwoven throughout the WISE Plan are strategies and actions designed to address critical workforce impediments related to housing, transportation and childcare.

The WISE Plan highlights the region’s key challenges regarding the workforce, including:

- Declining population
- Aging workforce
- Misperceptions about the region’s employment opportunities
- Mismatch of skills between what is being produced by the region’s post-secondary institutions and the needs of local employers
- Lack of diversity within the region
- Outmigration and out-commuting
- Limited childcare options and affordability
- Attracting people to the area
- Competition from nearby employment centers

The WISE Plan addresses these challenges through several strategies and actions to achieve the following goals:

- Increase student and worker employability skills
- Educate students, educators, parents, and other community members about the educational requirements for high paying, in-demand careers
- Prepare incumbent workers and mature jobseekers to have greater flexibility in the workplace
- Promote the 7 Rivers Region to targeted groups about the region’s benefits
- Foster inclusive regional communities to better attract minority and underrepresented individuals
- Assist and engage newly arriving families to area communities
- Provide businesses and jobseekers with comparative economic information
• Ensure the availability of affordable housing for the region’s workforce
• Provide information and tools that help companies prepare for pending retirements
• Develop public-private childcare partnerships to increase childcare facility capacity and address affordability gaps
• Bolster more connections and relationships between currently enrolled students, regional employers, and local communities
• Inspire businesses to implement initiatives that position them as “Employers of Choice”
• Improve transit, ridesharing, and multi-modal transportation options, and make transportation system more accessible

Talent Preparation strategies include programs and activities that build stronger connections between the region’s students and business and industry, and inform and educate guidance/career counselors and other influencing adults about the opportunities that exist within the region.

Talent Recruitment strategies include marketing the region and its assets to well-defined targets, sharing stories and messages of success and inclusion, and ensuring that new families are welcomed and supported upon arrival.

Talent Retention strategies include collecting and sharing best practices with the region’s employers that support and enhance the experiences of their current employees. Worker retention might occur by reducing the out-migration, but it may be even more important to slow the rate of retirements over time to allow the economy to adjust.

Ultimately, the success of the WISE Plan will be dependent upon sound implementation of the strategies and actions put forth in this plan. True progress can only be achieved when a diverse set of local partners coalesce around a shared vision and clear goals. The ambitious, comprehensive nature of the WISE Plan requires a concerted effort across many organizations in the public and private sectors.
Background

Businesses in the 7 Rivers Alliance Region report they cannot find enough workers to fill available jobs, especially those that require advanced skills. Business and education leaders are concerned that the pipeline of students comprising the future workforce is sputtering given the loss of young graduates to other places and the added challenge of a rapidly retiring workforce. Leaders in the 7 Rivers Region want to face these challenges head on and develop proactive solutions to ensure a stable workforce. The Workforce Innovation for a Strong Economy (WISE) Plan seeks to provide a roadmap. The project was catalyzed by a business survey conducted in 2015 that identified a need for skilled workers among 75% of respondents. The survey spurred action across the 7 Rivers Region—14 counties across Southwest Wisconsin, Southeast Minnesota, and Northeast Iowa—to address workforce challenges facing employers and to ensure continuing prosperity and growth in a globally competitive environment.

To develop a cohesive regional talent strategy, the 7 Rivers Alliance formed a regional Steering Committee of more than 50 business and community leaders and identified a consultant to work with regional partners to create the blueprint for a regional talent plan. The Consulting Team—led by the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC), and supported by the University of Northern Iowa’s Institute for Decision Making, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, and First Children’s Finance—was selected in January 2017 and immediately began meeting with employers, education providers, workers, students, and community leaders to gain insights and offer perspectives about the challenges facing the region.

This plan seeks to make an immediate and long-lasting impact on the identified shortage in the region’s overall talent pool. The plan includes a priority set of strategies and corresponding actions to address the fundamental workforce challenges facing the 7 Rivers Region. It is not intended to address every challenge facing the region nor to generate a complete laundry list of possible strategic actions. Instead, the plan focuses on a select number of strategies and related actions to help ensure the region’s talent supply and demand are aligned as a foundation for future growth.

The resulting WISE Strategic Action Plan represents a shared vision, articulates a call to action, describes effective strategies, and defines the specific actions needed to improve the region’s Talent Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention efforts.
Workforce Profile & Gap Analysis

The 7 Rivers Regional economy currently employs nearly 200,000 people. It is anchored by the urban employment centers of La Crosse, WI and Winona, MN, and by a strong industry base driven by manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and education.

Three interrelated dynamics are creating tight labor market conditions. First, the region’s unemployment rate has steadily fallen since the end of the Great Recession (2010) and is now below 4 percent, a rate often recognized as the benchmark for ‘full employment’. Second, roughly 25 percent of the region’s workforce is 55 and older (and growing as a share of the workforce), while at the same time the population aged 19 and under has fallen in recent years and will likely remain flat. This means that the number of new labor force entrants is not keeping pace with the number of people likely to retire from the labor force in the future.

Finally, the region’s labor force participation rate is roughly 67 percent, which is several percentage points higher than the nation’s rate of 64 percent. Given the region’s impressive labor force participation rate, and combined with its labor market age demographic trends, it is vital to encourage entrance into the regional labor market by students attending college in the region and to attract people currently living outside the region to work here.

The demographics of the region reveal that it is less diverse than the nation, as well as nearby metropolitan areas of Minneapolis-St. Paul and Madison. The residents in the 7 Rivers Region are more than 90 percent white, which is greater than the 60 percent white composition nationally.

The relative lack of racial or ethnic diversity in the region is notable because a diverse and inclusive workforce can offer an advantage in understanding and responding to emerging market changes as the U.S. population continues to change demographically.

Labor gap analysis

The gap analysis assesses key talent needs of targeted WISE region industries to identify gaps in the region’s talent pool and to aid educators and trainers in aligning and targeting their resources for the needs of these industries. Key occupations that appear across numerous industries include: bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks; general and operations managers; heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers; and maintenance and repair workers.

Based on this analysis, the region is expected to lose a net of 228 workers during the next decade if retirements and out-migration continue at the expected pace. That is essentially a flat labor force. At the same time, employment projections suggest the creation of 15,321 net new jobs during the same period. That means that the labor market will tighten even further, with a net shortage of 15,549 workers to fill the expected new jobs in the 7 Rivers Region over the next 10 years. By extension, this means that the 7 Rivers Region needs to attract and retain 1,500-2,000 more workers each year during the next decade. That retention might occur by reducing the out-migration, but it may be even more important to slow the rate of retirements over time to allow the economy to adjust.
Talent Preparation

Preparing a talented workforce to ensure a vibrant economy in the 7 Rivers Region will require modifying perceptions about the region’s economic opportunities, the education required for those jobs and responding to demographic trends. Because of stagnant growth in population aged 19 and under, the region also has seen a decline in students enrolled in two-year post-secondary institutions.

With a limited supply of young adults, the 7 Rivers Region will need to be increasingly proactive in helping youth and parents better understand the variety and viability of high-demand career paths available regionally. Perceptions about career options play an important role. There is still a strong aversion among parents to technical and community colleges. Many believe their children will be disadvantaged in the workforce without a four-year degree. Educating parents and students about career requirements can mitigate these misconceptions and help direct young people toward promising local careers.

One way that students discover careers is through work experiences. Numerous students noted difficulties in finding and securing internships or other “learning while earning” opportunities.

Another opportunity for the region's future workforce preparation is in "essential" or "soft" skills, particularly among young adults. This facet of job-readiness is not about technical ability or knowledge, but with employability skills typically associated with teamwork and interpersonal relationships, communications, work ethic, personal responsibility, and professionalism.

There also exists an expectation gap between what younger workers want and what employers believe is realistic and feasible. Younger workers feel they are ready for increasingly greater opportunities and should be compensated for them. Employers say workers are not always fully prepared for those opportunities and are not ready to meet worker wage expectations.

Talent Preparation Strategies

To achieve the identified goals, the WISE Steering committee developed a series of strategies and related actions to better prepare workers for career success. Each Talent Preparation strategy focuses on ensuring that available talent is better informed and more adequately prepared for available career opportunities.

1.1.1: Increase exposure to workforce expectations among students to improve job readiness and employability.

1.1.2: Strengthen business and education collaboration to better articulate skills needed for available jobs.

1.2.1: Create opportunities for students and jobseekers to learn more about careers at area businesses.

1.2.2: Market/promote 2-year post-secondary education as a pathway to work or an affordable 4-year education.

1.3.1: Provide businesses with resources to train and educate the current workforce on skills required to meet entry level and more advanced needs.
Talent Recruitment

The companies of the 7 Rivers Region are competing with those in nearby urban areas for workers. Between 2014 and 2015, most out-migration of residents occurred to the counties of Olmsted (MN), St. Croix (WI), Eau Claire (WI), Hennepin (MN), and Dane (WI). Every day 147,000 residents go to work, with 45,000 non-residents coming into the region and 66,000 residents commuting outside the region.

Stakeholders frequently cited the region's high quality of life features—good schools, safe neighborhoods, tight-knit communities, idyllic landscapes, and bountiful outdoor recreation activities—as a major selling point for attracting talent if these characteristics were marketed more persuasively to an appropriately targeted audience.

With zero net population growth from births and deaths, new workers will likely come from people moving to the region. Stakeholders frequently raised the issue of the region’s demographic homogeneity as an impediment to attracting talent from outside the region.

Parents typically encourage their kids to “find something you really enjoy” and not rush into making decisions about career paths. High school students cited enjoyment and salary as the biggest factors influencing their career decisions. College students said that they value workplace flexibility and job security in prospective future employers. The issue facing workers and students is not only low wages, but the relative cost of housing.

Frequently, entry level wages cannot support the cost of modern housing options in the region. Three issues are primarily to blame: (1) the need for appropriate rental housing for families with mid- to high-income levels; (2) inadequate tax revenues from low-density housing to support urban infrastructure; and (3) a mismatch between rising housing costs and relatively low household incomes.

Talent Recruitment Strategies

To achieve the identified goals, the WISE Steering committee developed a series of strategies and related actions to more efficiently attract residents and workers. Each Talent Recruitment strategy focuses on better informing residents and potential residents of economic and cultural opportunities in the region.

2.1.1: Create marketing and branding for the region (e.g., if you can't find a job in La Crosse, you can find one in Winona)

2.2.1: Increase the visibility of minority groups in the area.

2.3.1: Provide local "concierge" services.

2.4.1: Educate regional employers on relative wage differentials and engage businesses efforts to boost wages across the region.

2.4.2: Help companies learn about successful employee recruiting techniques.

2.5.1: Reshape public policies to make the region more attractive for workers to remain.

2.5.2: Develop funding mechanisms to foster employer-led initiatives to provide housing.
Talent Retention

Retaining talent is both about keeping workers at a specific firm and convincing local workers to take local jobs in the 7 Rivers Region. The challenge of both retaining workers at local firms and keeping workers from migrating frequently came up during discussions with local stakeholders.

Many noted the area’s relatively low wages as a challenge. This was a long-standing advantage for companies serving the Midwest, but in a labor market where skilled workers are at a premium, it becomes more challenging to keep workers if wages are higher elsewhere. Data validates that local wages are well below national averages, yet the cost of living in La Crosse, Winona, and Winneshiek Counties is not significantly different than the U.S. average. As workers become increasingly mobile, they are attracted to better paying job opportunities in nearby regions, or they are willing to move to large urban centers where opportunities are more plentiful.

In addition to challenges related to wages and housing, workers expressed a concern about the pre-determined structure of the workplace. While structure is necessary, it can also be limiting. Many younger workers expressed a desire to be challenged, actively appreciated, and listened to in the workplace.

Across nearly every focus group interview and workgroup session, issues surrounding the availability and affordability of childcare were raised. Some residents are opting not to participate in the workforce because the cost of childcare may exceed earnings potential. Rising wages and other cost pressures are driving up the cost of quality childcare. Parents are not willing to commute very far for childcare services which limits options within any small geographic area. Some childcare facilities are simply closing because they cannot make the revenue and expense balance work or they cannot find qualified workers.

Childcare is not the only inhibitor to workforce participation. Many graduating students, both high school and college, indicated that they plan to leave the region for a variety of reasons. Some concerns centered around perceptions regarding wages and career opportunities in the region, while others simply want to explore other regions of the country. Multicultural students reported the challenge of finding a welcoming community outside of campus.

Despite their concerns, many students expressed a desire to return to the region when they are ready to start a family. Many students also highlighted the enriching quality of life—safe neighborhoods, close communities, outdoor recreation—as reasons why the 7 Rivers Region is a wonderful place to grow up. High school students stated that family and career opportunities are the key reasons that will influence where they choose to live in 10 years.

A bigger issue may be the aging of the workforce. The size of the labor force aged 55 and over has increased more rapidly than the number of younger workers. From the employer’s perspective, an aging workforce and the impending wave of retirements is a major concern for several reasons. First, business owners worry about how their companies can effectively engage in succession planning, how to ease older workers into retirement, how to motivate younger workers to advance within their organization, and how to embrace generational differences in values and aspirations.
A second vital concern for employers is job-hopping by younger workers, which is largely the result of the tight regional labor market and relatively lower wages. With a strong labor demand and a scarce available labor supply, workers can change employers relatively easily.

Employers and potential employees volunteered that the region’s transportation systems are not adequately connected nor sufficiently reliable for use in commuting to jobs. For commuters traveling between rural areas and job centers, most transit focused on the need for more rideshare opportunities (carpools and van pools), but these still do not address intercity and local transit commuting options.

Commuting habits may only change when public perception of transit, ridesharing and multi-modal transportation options improves and becomes more accessible.

Talent Retention Strategies

To achieve the identified goals, the WISE Steering committee and the childcare, housing, and transportation workgroups developed a series of strategies and related actions to better retain regional residents and keep workers with local employers. Each Talent Retention strategy focuses on making the region and its employers more attractive to workers so that they are more likely to remain.

3.1.1: Identify and share best practices in flexible scheduling, job share and mentorship models with the region's employers.

3.2.1: Identify and support public policy changes that would help address childcare availability and affordability issues.

3.2.2: Increase awareness among employers of the value of organized, subsidized childcare for employees and for the employers' business.

3.2.3: Conduct a full regional childcare analysis (expanding on what has already been done in Jackson, Juneau and Monroe counties)

3.3.1: Create sector-based Talent Upload program for students to connect with local businesses to develop relationships.

3.3.2: Initiate regional activities that build enduring connectivity between graduates and the region.

3.3.3: Seek ways to promote the professional development of young adults working in the region and engage them as community leaders.

3.4.1: Share best practices with businesses about how to become an "employer of choice."

3.5.1: Expand rideshare and carpool/vanpool programs in the region to fill gaps in public transportation service and provide flexibility in trip planning.

3.5.2: Improve the park and ride system to support multi-modal transportation.

3.5.3: Engage in short-term planning and policy initiatives for the potential future establishment of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA).
**Conclusion**

The success of the WISE Plan will be determined by effective implementation of clear goals. In each area of Talent Preparation, Talent Recruitment and Talent Retention, research and input collected as part of the WISE Plan process is recapitulated, and the goals, strategies and ideas for action developed by the WISE Steering Committee are articulated. In addition, champion organizations are identified and potential success indicators are defined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Talent Preparation</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talent pool lacks essential/soft skills</td>
<td>1.1 Increase student and worker employability skills to ensure increased workplace readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disconnect between workforce readiness and perceptions of employer expectations and the hiring realities</td>
<td>1.2 Educate students, teachers, parents, and others about the educational requirements for high paying, in-demand careers</td>
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<td>Companies and employees are not flexible and adaptive to new technologies and innovation, causing workers to drop out of the labor force</td>
<td>1.3 Prepare incumbent workers and mature jobseekers for greater flexibility in the workplace</td>
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<tr>
<td>The region not attracting enough workers to keep up with employment demand</td>
<td>2.1 Promote the 7 Rivers Region benefits to potential residents and workers</td>
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<td>The region’s population is not ethnically diverse</td>
<td>2.2 Foster inclusive regional communities to better attract minority and underrepresented individuals</td>
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<td>Workers out-migrating and out-commuting due to lower wages, limited housing options, and lack of job prospects for family members</td>
<td>2.3 Assist and engage new families to area communities for better retention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental housing is not affordable or adequate for either entry-level or higher-wage workers. Affordable housing for purchase is limited.</td>
<td>2.4 Provide businesses and jobseekers with economic information for more informed decisions about hiring and employment options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old workers are leaving the workforce faster than new workers are replacing them</td>
<td>2.5 Ensure the availability of affordable housing for the region’s workforce.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local childcare options are limited and unaffordable</td>
<td>3.1 Provide companies information and tools to prepare for retirements and worker transitions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too many students leave the region after graduation</td>
<td>3.2 Develop public-private childcare partnerships to increase childcare capacity and address cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Younger workers seek appealing workplaces that they do not think they can find locally</td>
<td>3.3 Bolster connections and relationships between students, employers, and communities so more graduates remain or return to the area</td>
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<tr>
<td>The region’s transportation systems are not adequately connected nor sufficiently reliable for use in commuting to jobs</td>
<td>3.4 Inspire businesses to implement initiatives that position them as “Employers of Choice”</td>
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</table>
The ambitious, comprehensive nature of the WISE Plan requires a concerted effort across organizations and the public and private sectors. **These goals cannot be accomplished by a single organization. True progress can only be achieved when a diverse set of partners coalesce around a shared vision and clear goals.** Guided by the 7 Rivers Alliance, champion organizations who have been engaged throughout the process have been identified (and many have already agreed) to serve as key implementing agencies. They will be the primary conveners for their respective Action Groups as coordinated to achieve the strategies in the WISE Plan. Champions will work with other key partner organizations in the Action Groups to implement and modify appropriate actions, timelines for action and assignments of responsibility.

**Many of the challenges outlined in the plan confront not only the 7 Rivers Region, but many other small U.S. metro areas and rural regions as well.** Others also recruit and retain talent when their region is at a competitive disadvantage in terms of wages, housing options, transportation alternatives, and urban amenities. This means that the 7 Rivers Region must identify other advantages on which to compete – such as proximity to family, safety and security, and career fulfillment.

Preparing the next generation of talent involves leveraging existing resources (e.g., the region’s colleges and universities and natural/community amenities) to attract young adults to move to the 7 Rivers Region, and then convincing them to stay once they come. The strategies put forth range from more aggressive marketing to potential talent, alternative options to encourage better transit, housing, and childcare access, and local initiatives to make the region more welcoming to the next generation of workers – younger and more diverse.

Some of the challenges outlined in this plan are already being addressed at the local level. The region must collectively champion the advancement of local initiatives, as many of those solutions will need to be customized to the localities implementing them. The WISE Plan identifies those initiatives for localities to address, while dedicating the region’s collective attention to solutions that will make the most difference for the entire region.

There is no doubt that the WISE Plan is aggressive, ambitious and large in scope and execution. But the many challenges addressed in this plan require such an effort. Maintaining status quo will mean a net shortage of more than 15,000 jobs over the next 10 years when finding workers is already a challenge. Without a workforce, the region’s economy could stagnate or shrink. We want growth and prosperity.

**The WISE Plan has identified strategies that address the most significant challenges facing the region’s talent pipeline in order to “move the needle” on those issues and enable all workers and businesses to thrive in a fast-changing economy.**
WISE Plan Implementation Structure:
7 Rivers Alliance – General Coordinator and Convener

Talent Preparation
- Skill Upgrades Action Group (Goal 1.1)
- Career Exploration Action Group (Goal 1.2)
- Business/ Education Collaboration Action Group (Goal 1.3)

Talent Recruitment
- Talent Attraction Action Group (Goal 2.1)
- Diversity Engagement Action Group (Goal 2.2)
- Newcomer Welcome Action Group (Goal 2.3)
- HR Information Resource Action Group (Goal 2.4)
- Affordable Housing Action Group (Goal 2.5)

Talent Retention
- Senior Worker Transitions Action Group (Goal 3.1)
- Quality Childcare Action Group (Goal 3.2)
- Student/ Community Connections Action Group (Goal 3.3)
- Promoting Employers of Choice Action Group (Goal 3.4)
- Worker Transportation Action Group (Goal 3.5)
Big Picture Goals:
- Encourage targeted job growth and support workforce attraction, retention and development.
- Support tax base creation and assist in the elimination of blight
- Contribute to better housing opportunities, neighborhoods, and quality of life
- Work toward greater efficiency of public services through collaboration

Priorities:
- Develop, manage, and promote appropriate business and development assistance/incentive programs
- Promote and support entrepreneurship
- Perform meaningful, effective business outreach
- Promote land use and transportation policy links
- Inventory and promote development opportunities
- Develop County-owned properties to highest and best use while working to fill gaps in the market
- Assist in the development of other (municipal and private) properties
- Work with regional partners to study and provide public and board education on new trends and demographics, and maintain meaningful economic indicators
- Provide support for area non-profit organization that assist in meeting our big picture goals
- Market the benefits and opportunities of La Crosse County, and promote public awareness of economic development in our community