

# Embracing Change

## Strengthening Communities in Rural America

Alejandra Bejarano  
Pat Branstad  
Sue Harris



# Inclusive Development in Economic Development District's COVID-19 Recovery

Today's webinar is co-sponsored by:



With funding support from:



This webinar was prepared by NADO using Federal funds under award ED21HDQ3070009 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the participant(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

# Thanks for Joining the Webinar!

- Questions or comments can be submitted via the questions box on the right side of your screen in drop down menu
- A recording of the webinar will be made available soon at [www.nado.org](http://www.nado.org) & e-mailed to all registrants
- Please take a moment to complete the post-webinar survey to provide helpful feedback
- Contact Ciara Ristig at [cristig@nado.org](mailto:cristig@nado.org) with any questions about the webinar or project

# Today's Presenters

**Nicole Griensewic**, Executive Director  
Region 9 Development Commission

**Alejandra Bejarano**, Economic Recovery Planner  
Region 9 Development Commission

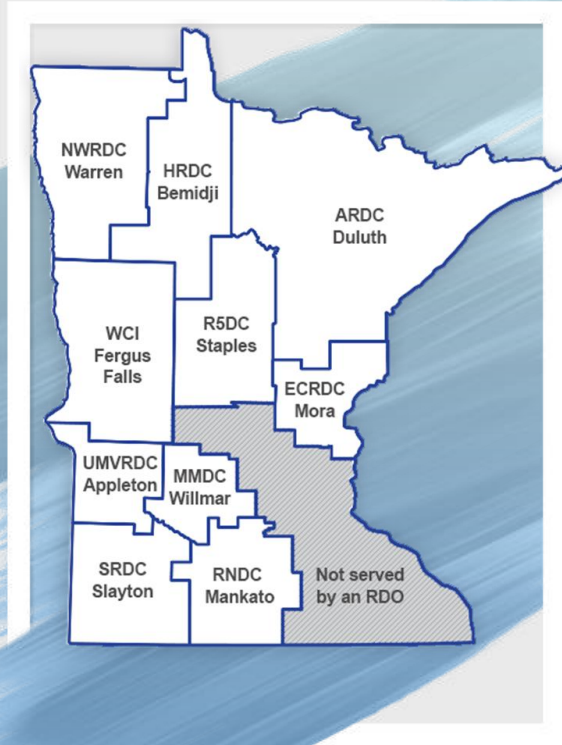
**Pat Branstad**, Uniting Cultures/Uniendo Culturas Facilitator  
St James, MN

**Sue Harris**, Community Education Director  
St James, MN

**Ciara Ristig**, Senior Program Manager  
NADO Research Foundation

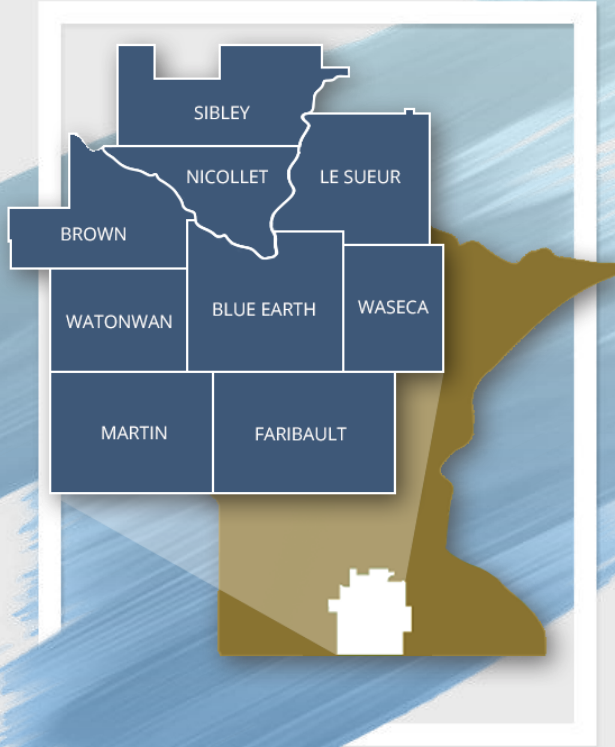


## Regional Development Organizations



- Established by Minnesota statute to provide technical assistance to local units of government in their region
- Provide a variety of services based on the unique needs of their region
- Partner with numerous state and federal agencies to obtain and administer grants for programs and projects at the local level
- Governed by volunteer commissions composed of elected officials, business and community leaders

# Nine Counties in South Central Minnesota



Blue Earth  
Brown  
Faribault  
Le Sueur  
Martin

Nicollet  
Sibley  
Waseca  
Watonwan

**72 Cities**  
**147 Townships**  
**33 School Districts**



## Labor trends

- Higher seasonality & turnover among workers of color compared to other workers.
- Underrepresented in these industries:
  - Finance and Insurance
  - Management of companies & enterprises
  - Professional, scientific, & technical services
  - Education
  - Arts, entertainment, & recreation
  - Public administration



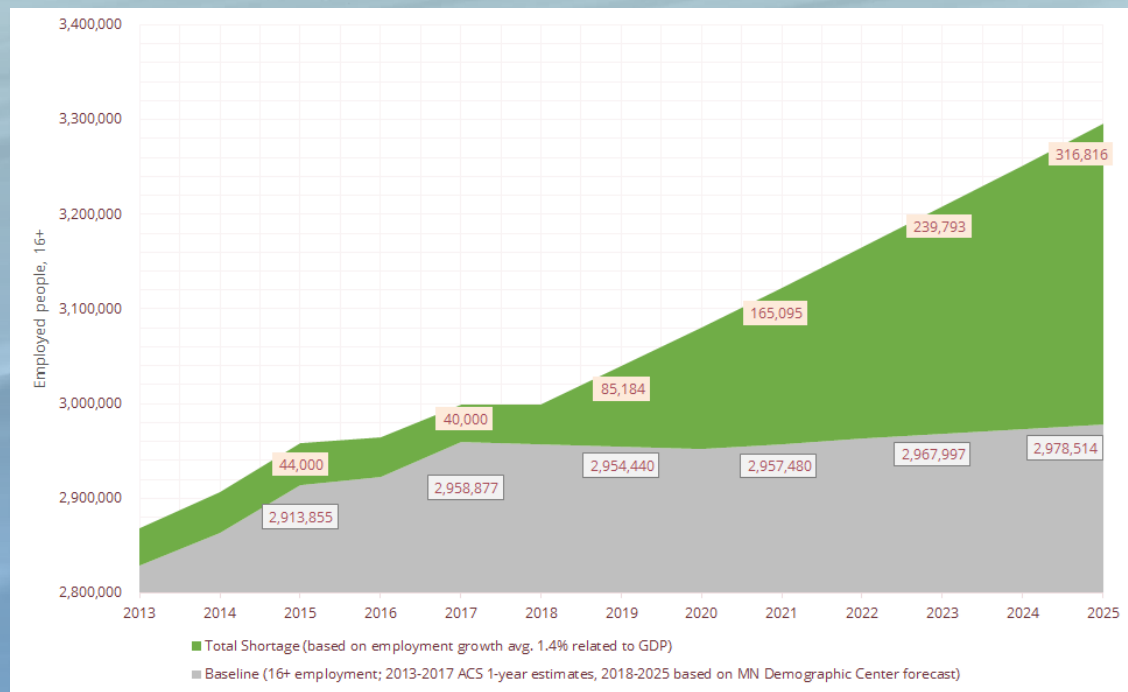


## Labor trends

- Labor market segments are like “*sandpits*.”
- Low-wage jobs offers **less upward mobility**.
  - Race and gender mobility gaps hold some workers back.
- Traditional pathways from low to high-wage work are expected to disappear (Escobari et al., 2021).

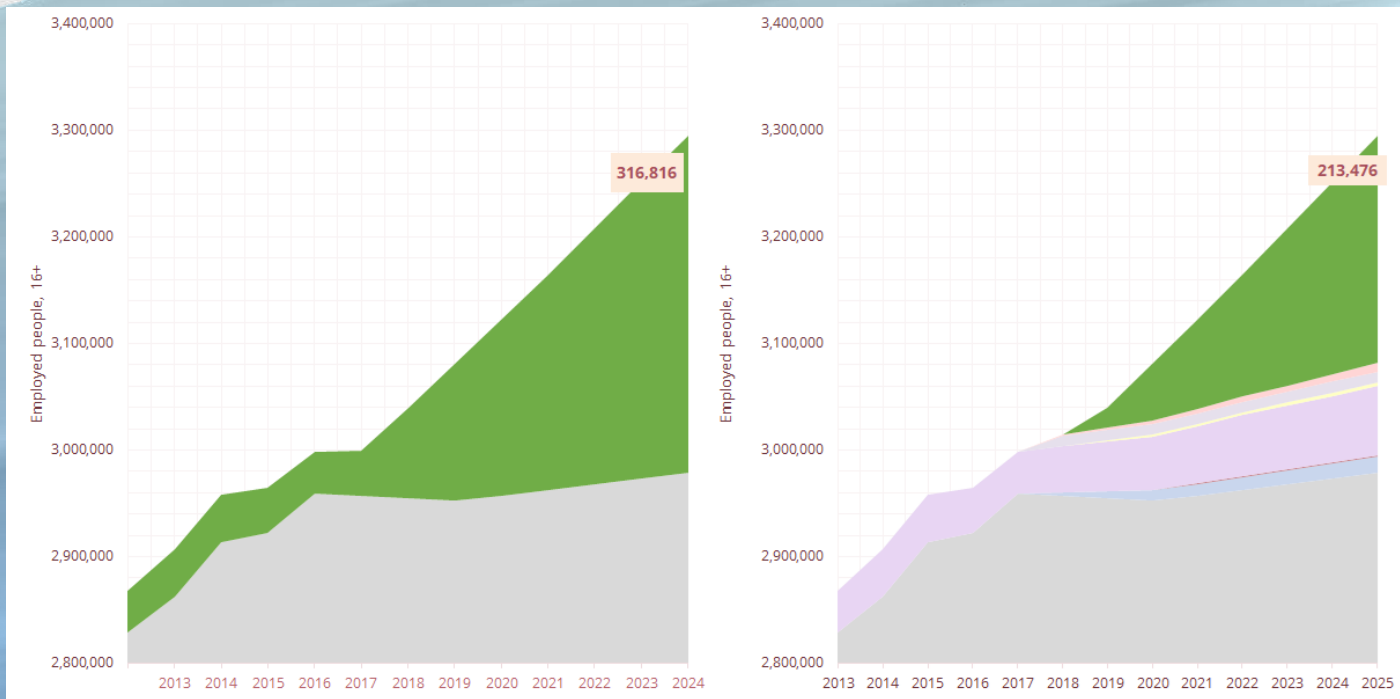


# Minnesota's labor shortage



MINNESOTA'S LABOR SHORTAGE. RealTime Talent. October 2016, Erin Olson, <https://www.realtimetalent.org/research-2/mnlaborshortage/>

# Minnesota's labor shortage



MINNESOTA'S LABOR SHORTAGE. RealTime Talent. October 2016, Erin Olson, <https://www.realtimetalent.org/research-2/mnlaborshortage/>

The image features a light gray background with two horizontal, overlapping blue brushstrokes. A white rectangular frame is centered over the brushstrokes. Inside the frame, the text "What can an RDC do?" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and vertically.

**What can an RDC  
do?**

# Partners



eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**EXTENSION**



SOUTHERN MINNESOTA  
INITIATIVE FOUNDATION



**Blandin Foundation**™  
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

## 2017

### IT'S TIME TO TALK: FORUMS ON RACE

It's Time to Talk: Forums on Race is a YWCA trademarked racial dialogue facilitation process utilizing trained facilitators to lead small table discussions on race.

## 2019

### WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROJECT (WCP)

Providing a framework for equity and inclusion learning through hands-on activities with subject-matter experts to build relationships, learn inclusive community practices, tools, and skills based on outcomes gathered through a community-wide assessment.

## 2020

### WCP DISTRIBUTES FUNDS FOR FOOD SHELVES

In response to the pandemic, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) Foundation of Minnesota (\$20,000) and SJP Consulting (\$2,500) provided the WCP with funds that were distributed to local food shelves in the communities where RELC and WCP programs have been held.

## 2021

### RIPPLE EFFECTS OF SOUTHERN MN EQUITY SUMMITS

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) was used to evaluate and document the impacts and themes of the Summit held in 2019 and 2020.

## 2018

### RURAL EQUITY LEARNING COMMUNITY COHORT (RELCC)

A learning cohort designed to bring together diverse stakeholders to share, examine, and explore inclusive best practices through education and relationship-building to build capacity for local action.

## 2019

### SOUTHERN MN EQUITY SUMMIT

A two-day statewide Rural Equity Summit in St. Peter geared toward small towns and rural communities in Minnesota as a platform to provide approaches and strategies to create a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable communities.

## 2020

### SOUTHERN MN EQUITY SUMMIT

Held virtually due to the pandemic, the Rural Equity Summit provided approaches and strategies for small towns and rural communities in Minnesota working to strengthen racial equity and social justice.

## 2022

### DEVELOPING A REGIONAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION PLAN

With funding from Bush Foundation, the plan will showcase data, strategies, and solutions that will aim to build more inclusive economies, recruit and retain talent, and reduce inequalities.



## **RDC as a catalyst for equity**

- Resources
  - Technical assistance
  - Grant writing
  - Community development expertise
  - Funding sources (Regional, state and federal)
  - Data & analysis
- Partnerships
  - Foundations, non-profits, experts, community liaisons.
- Training and mentorship
  - Strategic planning

A large, light blue brushstroke graphic that sweeps across the left side of the slide, partially overlapping a white rectangular frame.

## **Building internal capacity**

- Internal training and research
  - Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) Qualification
  - DEI toolkit
  - Consultants
- External resources
  - NADO, IEDC, online tools
  - Similar organizations
- Staff buy-in & commitment
- Review and update internal policies
- Board and commission makeup
  - Youth & minority commissioner

**NADO** National Association of Development Organizations  
Regional Strategies. Partnerships. Solutions.

ABOUT US | ADVOCACY | LATEST NEWS | RESOURCES | EVENTS & TRAINING | JOB BANK

## Equity Resources for Economic Development & Planning

NADO.org > Resources > Featured Resources > Equity Resources for Economic Development & Planning

Posted on: July 15th, 2020 by Carrie Kissel



**Equity & Inclusion Resources for RDOs**

Sustainable Communities Series

## Key Strategies to Advance Equitable Growth in Regions

**PolicyLink**

Sustainable Communities Learning Network




**New Growth Innovation Network**  
POWERING INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES



**INCLUSIVE RECOVERY INITIATIVE**



**INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

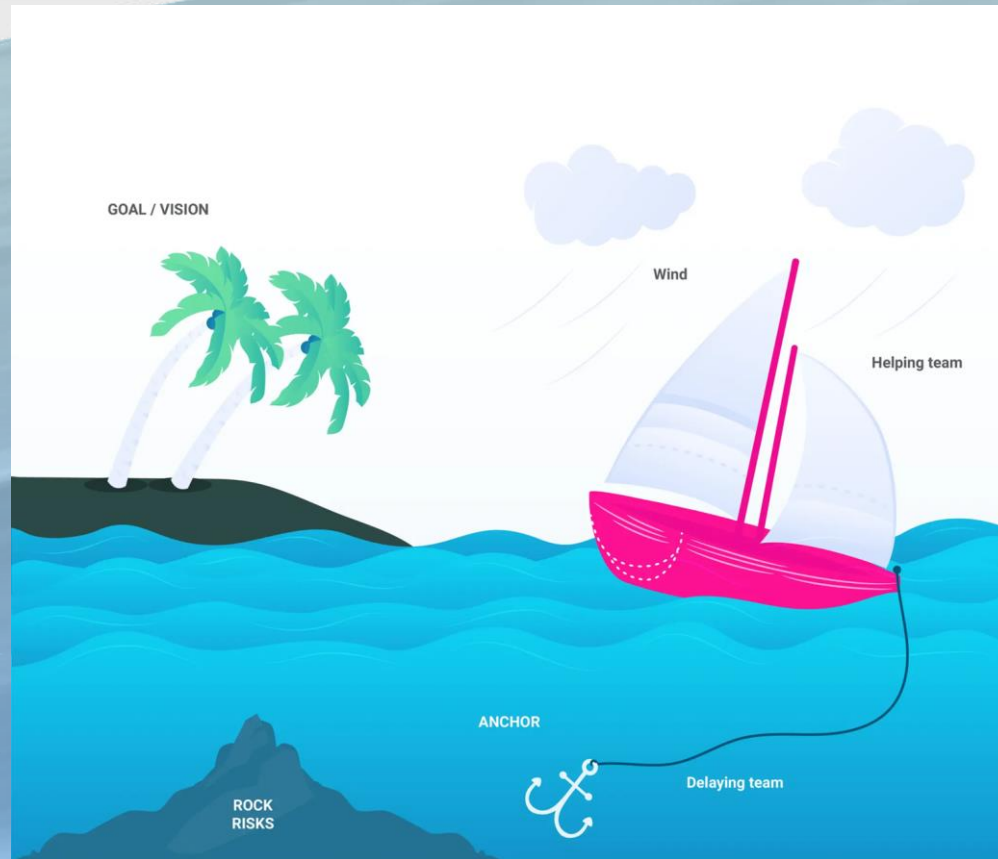


**CENTER FOR ECONOMIC INCLUSION**

**INDICATORS OF AN INCLUSIVE REGIONAL ECONOMY**





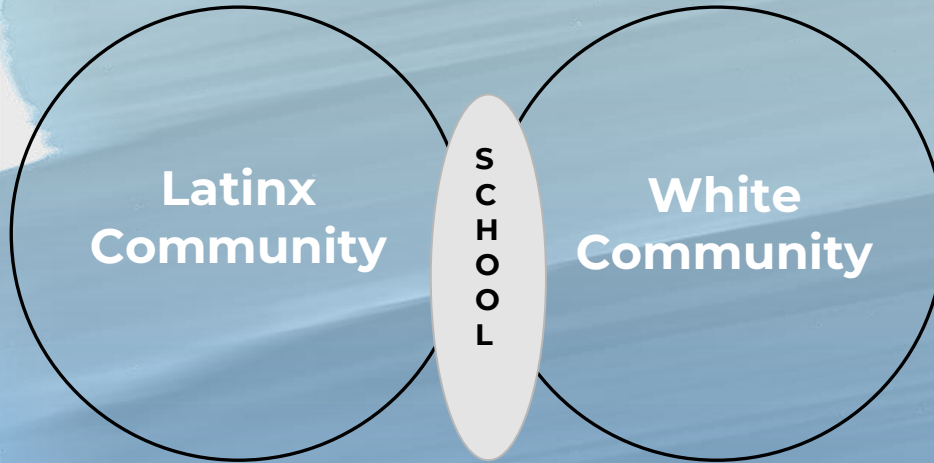




## St. James MN

- Railroad town - 150 years old in 2020
- Rural - Population: 4,750
- Industry – Food Processing & Agriculture
- Low income - over 56% Free and Reduced lunch
- Settled by northern European immigrants
- Shift in demographics last 35-40 years - Mainly Latinx - more rural stable population due to immigration
- Community 38% non-white
- School 51% non-white

# Past Community Efforts to Address Changing Demographics



Late 90s: The Spirit of St. James  
→ Unity / Unidad

Mid 2000s: Horizons – Poverty Reduction  
→ Leadership Plenty, Study Circles

Latinx Leadership:  
Convivencia Hispana

↓  
Region 9  
Forum on Race  
Spring 2017

→  
2016 Presidential Election  
→ Next Steps for Action

↓  
**Joint  
Meeting**

# IT'S TIME TO TALK: FORUM ON RACE

Region Nine Development Commission  
Greater Mankato Diversity Council and the YWCA





Past History



New Efforts



Community ready for action

Uniting  
Cultures

Uniendo  
Culturas  
August 2017



# Ripple Effects

## School District



Equity Team

Teachers of Color

Staff Development

Social Justice Club

School strategic plan

Fiscal host:  
Uniting Cultures/ Uniendo Culturas  
& Convivencia Hispana



Black  
Lives  
Matter

***“We realized that silence is not going to be acceptable or the norm anymore” ~ Briar Lenz***





# Community Response



***"White Fragility"***  
**monthly discussion**



Building Bridges for Thriving Communities  
A Summit for Equity

**Local  
Sponsorships of  
Equity Summit**



**Local Church  
Study Groups**

## Community response

### **Broad base support for families with food insecurity:**

- Backpack - High School Food Pantry
- Family Food Giveaway
- Support for Food Shelf



### **City:**

- Bilingual publications/ signage
- Support for Equity Summit
- Support for Latinx businesses and entrepreneurs
- Handyman's Certificate



**CONVIVENCIA  
HISPANA**

## Local Latinx group - Convivencia Hispana

- "Our Golden Age"
- Partners in the community Art Place project and helped design our "new" Plaza
- Received **Department of Health grant** for Covid Education and Immunization outreach





## “New” Downtown Mural - A special story of Immigration in St. James





## MISSION STATEMENT

To create community  
where acceptance and  
belonging, community  
pride and ownership,  
and celebration of  
diversity are the way  
we are together

A large, light blue brushstroke graphic that sweeps across the upper left portion of the slide, partially overlapping the title box and the 'Community Efforts' section.

## **Efforts in the past four years**

### **Community Efforts**

- Education and celebration of cultural and ethnic diversity
- Building bridges through trusting relationships
- Support of Convivencia Hispana
- Equity work

### **Organizational Development**

- Intercultural competency
- Sustainability
- Building capacity for increasing social capital



# Education and Celebration of cultural and ethnic diversity

## Multicultural Fiesta







***“One of the beautiful things for people is to show their kids, grandkids, where they come from. We don’t want our ancestors to die.”***



*"Before [these events]  
we felt excluded..."*



*Now we can say that  
we feel included."*  
~Julieta





# Education and celebration of cultural and ethnic diversity

## Culture through Cuisine



Salvadoran

Mexican

Guatemalan

Scandinavian

## Culture Through Cuisine



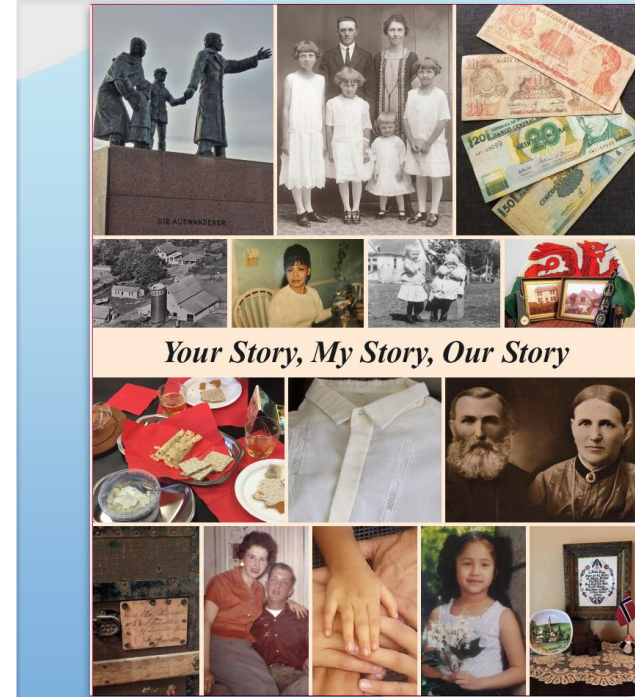
# Community Conversations





# Learning one another's stories

## Your Story, My Story, Our Story

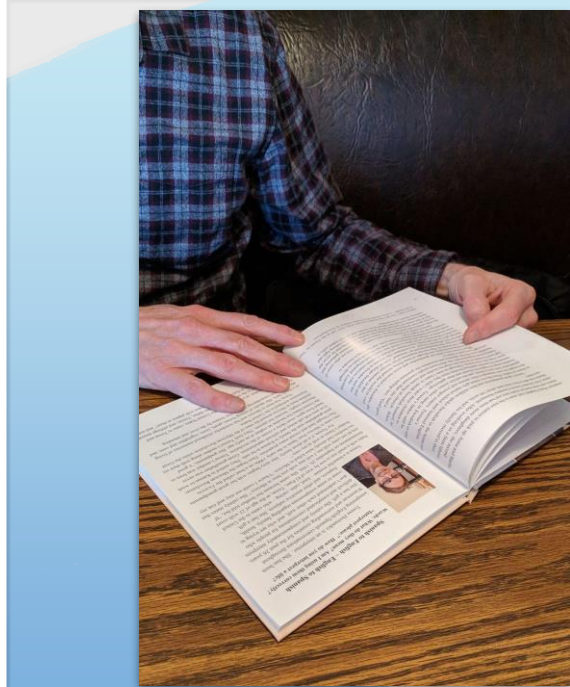


# Your Story, My Story, Our Story

*"Each of us has a story."*

***"This puts a face on the word  
immigrant."***

*"Each story is unique, there isn't  
only "one" immigration story."*





## Your Story, My Story, Our Story

*"We didn't have anything. No money. We had the dream to survive...the ones after us have to know their roots. Many of us will be gone but we have to leave our legacy of pride of where we come from...our customs, our values, that fighting spirit."*



***"We've shared our stories and that's allowed us to be more humanized"***

## Your Story, My Story, Our Story

*“When I first got here I felt as a little grain of sand; no one really gave importance to myself or my culture. Maybe we come from different continents and different situations but we have something in common that has propelled us to be here, that we are immigrants. **Now I feel a part of you.**” ~ Marta*



# Rural Equity Learning Community

- Operating in a multicultural context - intercultural competency
- Building capacity within the community



# Multicultural Context

- Language
- Decision Making
- Meeting Norms



# Building Capacity To Increase Social Capital

- Expanding our stakeholder base
- Supporting other community organizations





# Convivencia Hispana

- Scholarship support
- Mentoring & organizational support
- “Our Golden Age”
- Day of the Dead



# Equity work

- Working Out Loud  
Circles: Becoming Anti-racist
- Community Education  
EDI programming
- Equity Summit
- Social Justice Scholarship



# Challenges

- Cultural differences
- Financial resources
- Focus and prioritization
- Sustainability
- Social capital loss
- Pushback from within community





## Successes

- Recognized as leaders in equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts
- Trusting relationships and true friendships
- Sense of belonging in community
- Ripple effects

***“For the first time in 25 years we feel included in this community...to feel included is the ability to contribute.” ~ Marta***

# How did we get here?

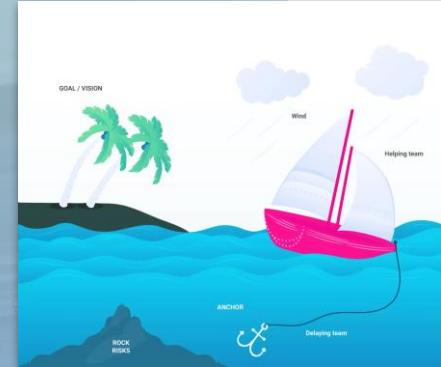
- JUST DO IT
- Don't wait until you have all the answers and a perfect plan
- Build on past initiatives

## Engaging community stakeholders

- Identify, invite, listen, ask and engage
- Recognize one another's cultural lens
- Develop a plan

## Build trusting relationships

- Listen
- Engage community leadership and gatekeepers
- Leadership changes
- Keep reaching out: renew connections and nurture them
- Outside partnerships







Thank you! Questions?

<https://tinyurl.com/NADO2022>

**Alejandra Bejarano**

*Region Nine Development  
Commission*

507-389-8871

[alejandra@rndc.org](mailto:alejandra@rndc.org)

**Pat Branstand**

*Uniting Cultures/Uniendo  
Culturas*

507-317-5321

[pat.branstad@gmail.com](mailto:pat.branstad@gmail.com)

**Sue Harris**

*St. James Public Schools*

507-375-4517

[sharris@isd840.org](mailto:sharris@isd840.org)