



**2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Annual Report and Update – Published April 9, 2021**

Regional Economic Conditions

The region continues to experience evolving economic challenges due to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Beginning in spring of 2020, the tourism industry and most small businesses suffered sudden declines in sales due to social distancing, mandatory closures, and fear of exposure. As summer approached, parts of the region which had lower COVID-19 case numbers began to experience high numbers of visitors, with crowding of outdoor recreation sites and full booking of vacation rentals such as AirBnBs. Hotels had lower booking rates and retail had mixed results, along with restaurants that were not equipped to offer take-out and often had insufficient revenues to cover their overhead or maintain pre-covid employment levels.

After restrictions were eased, businesses with owners, family members or employees who were in high-risk categories for severe COVID-19 infections often remained closed or re-opened with very limited services, including some childcare and retail businesses. In industries such as agriculture and construction, supply chain disruptions resulted from lack of access to processing facilities (closure of meat processing plants), and long delays in delivery of materials and equipment (flooring, plumbing, doors, cabinetry, appliances, mechanical, etc.). The very small number of agricultural producers using direct-market sales channels saw increased demand for both produce and meat products. Some of these businesses had enough additional production to take advantage of that growth, including producers who offered direct-market sales for the first time during the pandemic. Lack of access to local and regional slaughter and meat processing facilities was one barrier to growth in this market.

In early 2021, the health care industry in partnership with state government began ramping up to provide Covid-19 vaccinations to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. COVID-19 case rates and vaccination rates vary per county. Baker County cases per 100,000 people – 4,108; vaccinations per 100,000 people – 2,643. Union County cases per 100,000 people – 4,984; vaccinations per 100,000 people – 1,768. Wallowa County cases per 100,000 people – 2,103; vaccinations per 100,000 people – 2,231. It is hoped that as vaccinations continue, restrictions on activities and capacities will be eased and hard-hit sectors such as restaurants and retail will begin to see more foot traffic and sales.

As of April 2021, NEOEDD has provided \$845,500 in COVID financial supports (federal, state and private donation funding) to small businesses and nonprofit employers. NEOEDD pivoted to providing business development classes and other technical assistance online, including classes and resource information specific to COVID-19 recovery and resiliency. NEOEDD also developed new collaborative partnerships to advocate for resources needed by small rural businesses. As the pandemic continues, we anticipate that additional investments will need to be made to support businesses financially and to help them transition to a post-COVID

economy that includes increased tourism impacts in rural areas; competition from online sales; and in-migration of retirees, remote workers (zoom towns) and second-home residents.

Prior to the pandemic, the tourism industry was showing strong gains, however by the end of 2020, year over year declines were significant for the Eastern Oregon Region. Compared to 2019, visitor spending in 2020 decreased by 45%, on par with other parts of the state (decreases of 43% to 60%), however employment losses (7% decline) were not as high as other regions of Oregon (15% to 33% declines). Lodging occupancy rates were down 21%.

Wood products employment in Union County continued to experience significant decline, with an 11% decrease from 2017 to 2019, a loss of 99 jobs.

Opportunity Zones

The region contains two Opportunity Zones, one in Union County and one in Baker County ([See 2020 CEDS Update](#)). There have been no projects implemented in the past year to develop the Opportunity Zones. The city of La Grande had planned to work with a consultant to pursue marketing and development of the Opportunity Zone in Union County, but COVID-19 forced them to delay the start of that activity.



The Opportunity Zones in Union and Baker counties can be used as assets to accomplish the following CEDS goals and objectives:

Goal 1 - Diversify the economy and increase the percentage of family-wage jobs

Objective 1a: Encourage more business-friendly local governments and communities

Objective 1b: Retain and expand existing businesses

Objective 1e: Increase recreation-related manufacturers

Goal 2 – Increase and formalize regional economic development collaboration

Objective 2a: Take advantage of common characteristics to position region as more resilient and attractive for residents, businesses, and visitors

Goal 3. Assess, improve, and utilize infrastructure needed for economic growth

Objective 3b: Improve and develop economic-development assets

Resiliency and Pre Disaster Recovery Planning

The 2018-2023 CEDS includes information on Hazards and Risks in NE Oregon as well as a report on Strategies to Build Economic Resilience and Preparedness Across Oregon. Economic resiliency helps businesses and communities recover from an economic shock. An economic shock may be a natural disaster (e.g. fire, earthquake, extreme weather or pandemic) or a man-made disaster such as federal policy regarding use of public lands or the closure of a major employer. In the past year, NEOEDD has participated in COVID-19 recovery and resiliency planning activities, both in our region, and alongside other economic development districts in Oregon. We prioritized COVID-19 business response services over other programming to the greatest extent possible, including advocating for business recovery resources that would meet the needs of the very small businesses which dominate the region's economy; collaborating with state and local government, nonprofit partners and individuals to acquire and distribute funding; delivering recovery and resiliency training for businesses to plan a way forward post-pandemic; and developing new partnerships to support longer term investment in Oregon's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Within our region we also developed and conducted a COVID-19 Needs Assessment. From January – March 2021, we conducted 75 interviews with stakeholders representing a diversity of sectors across our region. The Needs Assessment identified pre-existing strengths and challenges as well as impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and opportunities for recovery and resiliency actions. The Needs Assessment will be incorporated as Appendix A to the 2021 CEDS Update when it has been finalized. The results of the Needs Assessment will help inform NEOEDD's Recovery Plan, which we expect to complete by July of 2021. The region's Recovery Plan will outline actions lead by NEOEDD and other collaborative partners in response to the region's needs. It is anticipated that state and federal funding will aid in the implementation of many recovery and resiliency activities.

The region's ability to recover from COVID-19 will be partly based on the efficacy of and participation rates for vaccination programs and their ability to contribute to declining rates of infection and hospitalization and development of 'herd immunity.' This would in turn allow for the provision of routine school/child care and a return to work for many caregivers who have left the labor force, especially women. It would also assist in the recovery of the tourism industry. Many people in the region are still hesitant to be vaccinated and it remains to be seen what total vaccination rates will be by summer of 2021 when all person's desiring to be vaccinated should have had the ability to do so.

We have seen many businesses demonstrate their resiliency by drawing on financial reserves, investing time in accessing funding, and changing their business practices (reducing costs, developing new sales channels or products). Nonetheless, we know that some businesses have closed and others are struggling to remain in operation. There are also some businesses which have opened during the pandemic. It is easier to get business establishment data than business closure data, but we will continue to try and find ways to understand how this is playing out in our region's economy.

Regional Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan

The goals and objectives focus primarily on creating a more productive, more sustainable, and more vibrant rural community. This will involve catalyzing a shift in rural development strategy across several sectors that respond to key changes in economic and environmental systems. This approach focuses primarily on “building from within,” mobilizing and strengthening local assets, and forming partnerships to fill gaps in order to strengthen our rural economy and rural-urban interdependence. The actions should reflect new ways to build the capacity of and engage marginalized rural people, places, and firms – all to reduce economic disparities and improve health and livelihoods. Regional partners seek projects that can provide economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Goals

1. Diversify the economy and increase the percentage of family-wage jobs.
2. Increase and formalize regional economic development collaboration.
3. Assess, improve, and utilize infrastructure needed for economic growth.
4. Improve, develop, and expand community assets.
5. Strengthen and/or improve ability of nonprofits and local governments to meet needs and enhance quality of life for the public.

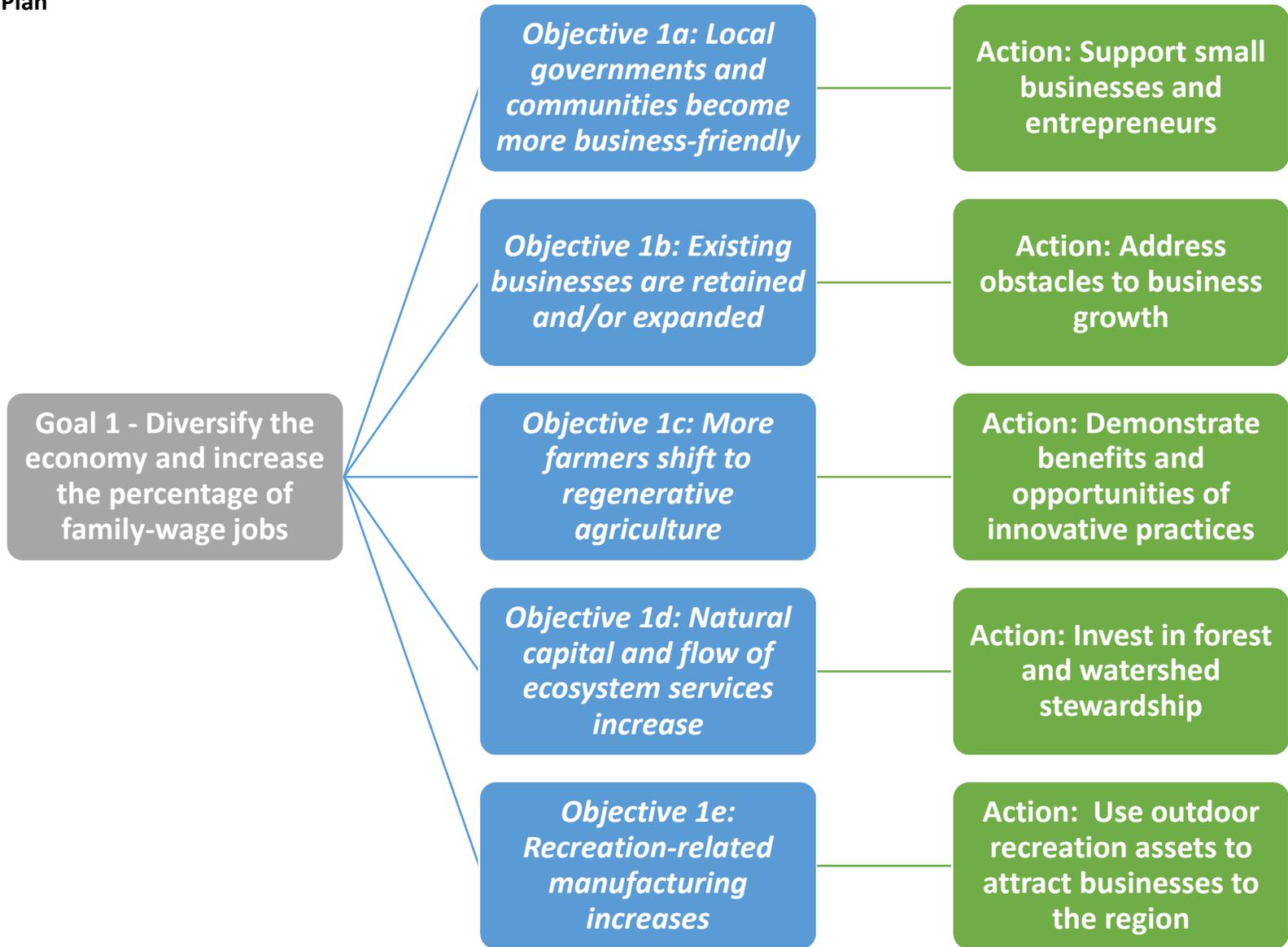
Objectives

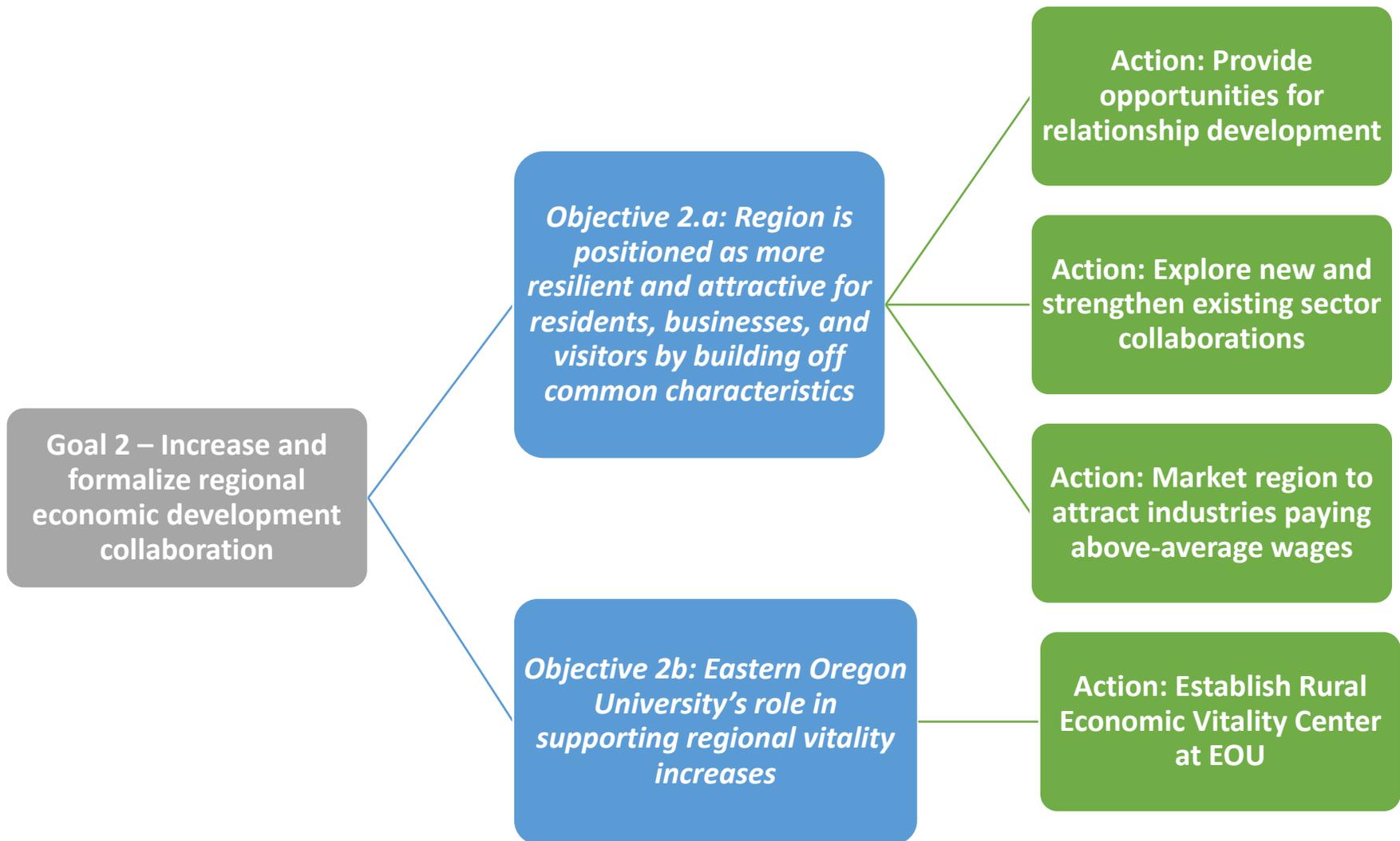
In developing the five-year plan, NEOEDD selected objectives that would promote economic development and opportunity while providing social and environmental benefits to the region's residents. Objectives were selected to meet the following criteria:

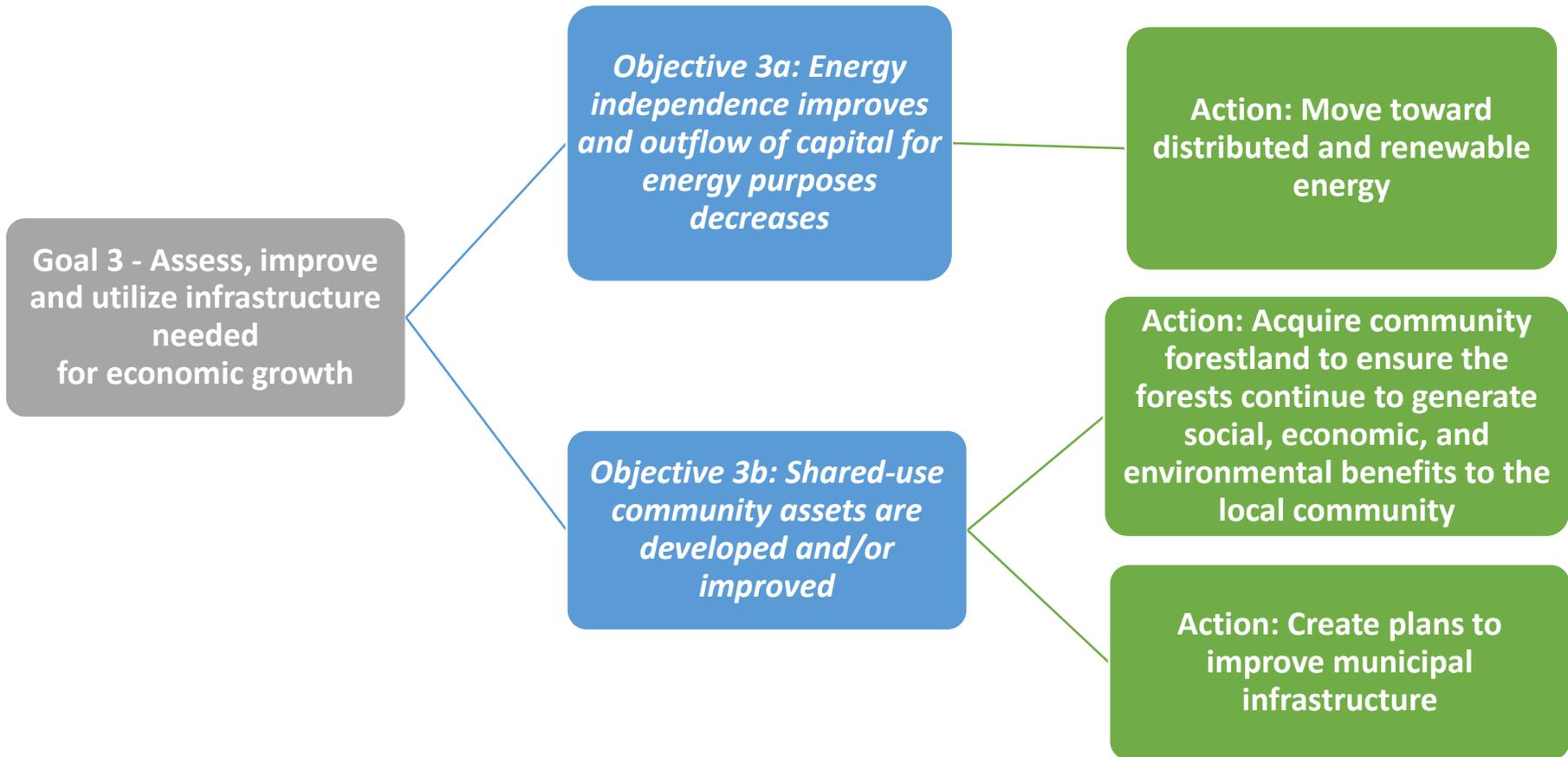
- Facilitate planning among municipalities, nonprofits, and citizens, and foster diversity, acceptance, and sense of belonging
- Enhance and protect the environment through projects that emphasize conservation and sustainable use of resources, such as basic infrastructure, food, and energy

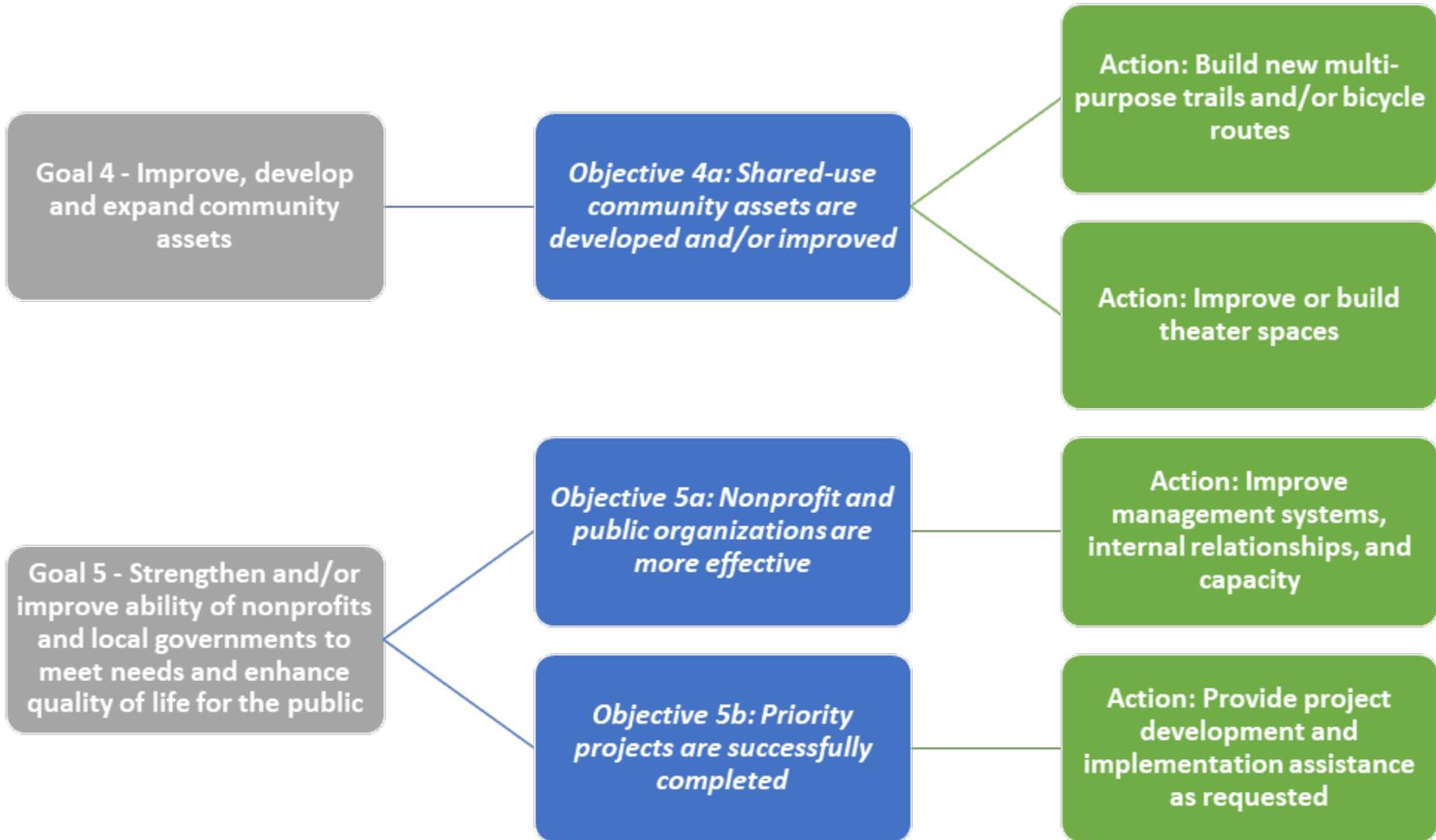
- Respond to the threats and weaknesses that have been identified
- Build off the region's strengths, opportunities, and past investments
- Be appropriate to the capacity of NEOEDD and its partners, doable, tangible, and be things that "get results"
- Take advantage of partnerships and collaboration to leverage internal and external resources, including public and private
- Be started or implemented during the five-year time frame and lead to achievement of goals
- Innovate and build on regional and national trends

Action Plan









Vital Project Updates

Goal 1 - Diversify the economy and increase the percentage of family-wage jobs

Objective 1a: Local governments and communities become more business-friendly

Action: Support small businesses and entrepreneurs

Vital Project 1a.1 Lead Organization: NEOEDD

- Support the development and use of entrepreneurial coworking and networking centers
 - *Due to COVID-19 we closed the Ignite Center for Entrepreneurship in La Grande in March 2020 and began plans for to reopen while complying with public health guidelines. We were able to reopen the Center in March 2021.*
 - *We are evaluating other potential locations for this center. NEOEDD worked with City of La Grande to develop a plan to upgrade and remodel the City's Historic Fire Station to house the Ignite Center for Entrepreneurship and plans to apply for EDA CARES funding.*
- Introduce or enhance entrepreneurship education at the K-16 levels
 - *NEOEDD's joint project with the City of La Grande resulted in the Lemonade Day's online curriculum being available for all youth in the region through the end of the year.*
 - *Baker School District 5J has added a two-year entrepreneurship program to their curriculum for high school students.*
- Provide classroom instruction, business counseling, coaching, and support services
 - *Staff met by telephone with over 150 entrepreneurs seeking resources to assist with COVID-19 impacts to their businesses, including information on Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, where to get help with SBA financing programs, regulatory compliance with COVID-19 guidelines, local and state/federal grant funds and other questions. Types of businesses assisted included food cart, chimney sweep, childcare/preschool, restaurants, beverage manufacturing, hair salons, lodging, trucking, artists, farm stands/u-pick, chiropractors, dentists, auction/flea market, boat and motor vehicle repair, event venues, outfitter/guides, main street retail, massage therapists, metal materials distributor, printing, and graphic design, among others.*
 - *Over 40 people attended a COVID-19 resource webinar organized in early April and about 10 people attended a women's business-owner networking and marketing online event in May. A webinar on how to apply for CDBG grant funds for Small Business and Microenterprises Impacted by COVID-19 was hosted and recorded in March 2021.*
 - *Staff delivered a new Creation Destination 8-part workshop two times.*
 - *Staff delivered the online version of the Foundations of Business 6-session business planning class three times.*

- *Blue Mountain Community College SBDC offered courses in Financial Essentials for Business; Computer Skills for the Workplace, Accounting with Quickbooks Online Suite; Django for Python Developers; Intro to Artificial Intelligence; Blockchain Fundamentals and Profit Mastery.*
- Finance businesses through loans, IDA accounts, and private and public investments
 - *Unfortunately, the Individual Development Account program was not supported by donations to the Neighborhood Partnership Fund (most likely because of the changes in the federal income tax code which made the state tax credit program less desirable to tax payers) and we were not allocated any additional funding for the April 1, 2020-March 31, 2021 IDA year. Funding was available on a first-come, first-served basis and we were still able to enroll eight new savers during that time period. The overall graduation/completion rate is 88%. To date, 147 graduates have saved over \$348,957 matched with \$957,695 from the IDA program. We are currently supporting 31 savers.*
 - *NEOEDD's EDA RLF is 72% deployed, NEOEDD RBEG RLF is 0% deployed and 62% of NOBD's loan capital is deployed.*
 - *NEOEDD provided \$845,500 in COVID financial supports (federal, state and private donation funding) to small businesses and nonprofit employers. This included a collaboration of NEOEDD and four other organizations to create a Wallowa County Covid-19 Business Fund with local donations.*
 - *NEOEDD collaborated with the City of La Grande to administer a Covid-19 loan fund and deployed \$180,020 of emergency loan funding to 25 businesses impacted by COVID-19.*
 - *NEOEDD received an additional \$850,000 of COVID-response funding through EDA, which is now available to lend.*

Vital Project 1a.3 Lead Organization: SBDC

- Assist businesses to increase online sales
 - Blue Mountain Community College SBDC offered a series on Digital Marketing Essentials and a course in Online Marketing Communications.

Objective 1b: Existing businesses are retained and/or expanded

Action: Address obstacles to business growth

Vital Project 1b.1 Lead Organization: EO Workforce Board

- Assist identified sector businesses in addressing prioritized problems or concerns
 - *Eastern Oregon Workforce Board (EOWB) has continued their engagement with the health care sector. They are reconsidering engagement with the manufacturing sector as participation dwindled in 2020. They decided to investigate transportation as a potential sector to convene for a collaborative approach.*
- Assist schools, particularly Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, in developing curriculum that exposes youth to career opportunities in Eastern Oregon
 - *A new Bachelor Degree in Sustainable Rural Systems was launched in Fall 2020 at Eastern Oregon University and provides another option for high school CTE student to continue their education within the region.*
- Work with service contractors to provide training for adults, dislocated workers, and youth in choosing a career path
 - *EOWB is working with Training and Employment Consortium (TEC) to continuing with pretesting classes to prepare workers to pass the GED test. Overall, the Adult/DW Program saw major decreases in participants in 2020 and recruitment and outreach efforts are being increased for more community exposure. TEC established a toll-free line in August to assist customers needing services. TEC also hired two new Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Youth Work Experience Coordinators to assist in recruiting youth and creating Work Experience opportunities. Training, internships, and work experiences have become limited due to hiring freezes and layoffs related to COVID and some of the restrictions placed on essential service businesses.*

Objective 1c: More farmers shift to regenerative agriculture

Action: Demonstrate benefits and opportunities of innovative practices

Vital Project 1c.1 Lead Organization: NEOEDD

- Engage the Wallowa County Community Food Systems Council
 - *Staff met with the leadership team for a FEAST event in Wallowa County and provided assistance in deciding how to proceed since the in-person event was postponed due to the pandemic. FEAST (Food-Education-Agriculture-Solutions-Together) is a forum facilitating public conversations and project planning about the local food system. The decision was made to distribute most of the FEAST funding (provided by Oregon Food Bank) for urgent needs including forward contracting with local farmers for produce to supply the food bank; funding to assist public schools to meet increased demand for free school meals; and donations to the food bank for purchases needed to respond to increased demand, and funding for the farmers market for equipment to allow them to meet social distancing guidelines for reopening for the season. An online FEAST event was held in March, 2021 with panelists providing insights on the challenges and opportunities of farming, food distribution and food access in Wallowa County. Afterwards, one project was selected to receive seed funding for an information campaign to widely distribute a comprehensive list of food and transportation services available in Wallowa County, as well as opportunities to support those programs.*
 - *The Wallowa County Food Council met twice, to learn about new distribution, production and food access activities and to organize subcommittees to engage with Farm to School; Meat Processing and Update of the Community Food Assessment.*
 - *Staff conducted outreach to the Food Council regarding a call for garden mentors to assist new gardeners in Wallowa County and shared information, including: Webinar on Covid-19 impacts on Oregon essential farmworkers, Covid-19 resources for Oregon Small Farms, and Statewide evaluation of Veggie Rx programs. Staff assisted Slow Food Wallowa to find a representative of the Food Council to serve on their Producer Grant selection committee.*
- Support development of community food system councils in Baker and Union counties
 - *Staff met with representatives from Oregon Rural Action (ORA) in Union County regarding their planning for a FEAST event and answered questions about the history of the Wallowa County Food Council. ORA was also encouraged to attend the Wallowa County FEAST event.*

- Connect regional food system partners and provide networking opportunities
 - *Staff continues to serve on the Oregon Community Food System Network (OCFSN) Leadership, Beginning Farmer Rancher Development and Access to Land teams. Staff worked with a pro bono attorney to complete bylaw revisions for the Network. Staff helped plan and facilitate a November OCFSN networking event with online presentations by member organizations led by Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Immigrant and Refugee communities about their priorities and approaches as part of scoping a Food Charter for Oregon. More than 150 people registered to view the presentations, including a number of partners from our region, such as OSU Extension, farmers markets, Oregon Rural Action, Slow Food Wallowa, farm-to school and others. The event was recorded for further distribution.*
 - *Staff helped develop a successful proposal to secure \$75,000 in Oregon Community Foundation funding to support OCFSN coordination, engagement and training/education activities for the statewide network's 56 member organizations and their partners collaborating to improve Oregon's food system.*
 - *NEOEDD staff assisted the Oregon Farm to School and School Gardens Network (OFSSGN) to procure contracted services for a Regional Hub Coordinator for Farm to School partners in our region.*
 - *Staff monitored information on food-system related legislation for the 2020 Legislative session and shared it with the Food Council and other regional partners.*
 - *NEOEDD provided testimony in favor of HB2785 to establish a grant program to fund upgrades to meat processing establishments expected to operate under a program of state meat inspection.*

Vital Project 1c.2 Lead Organization: Farmers Markets in Wallowa, Baker, Union

- Support farmers markets
 - *Staff contracted with the Baker City Farmers Market to assist with recruitment and training of vendors; they presented a marketing assessment and recommendations to board and staff in April, and in May held an online branding and marketing training for vendors and BCFM staff/board.*

Vital Project 1c.3 Lead Organization: Oregon Community Food System Network

- Support SNAP match, Veggie RX and Farm-to-School programs that increase the local market demand and the amount of locally grown food consumed by the general population including those with lower incomes, less-healthy diets, and/or children

- *NEOEDD assisted the Oregon Farm to School and School Gardens Network to secure contracted services for a Regional Hub Lead to support procurement and other activities for participating or interested schools and farmers in our region.*
- *Staff shared information on opportunities to provide input on Oregon's Farm to School programs for the 2020 2nd Legislative session.*
- *Staff disseminated information from the Statewide 2019-2020 Report evaluating the impacts Veggie Rx programming on medical and behavioral health.*
- *Staff met with the Food Corps volunteer serving in La Grande and provided feedback and referrals for outreach and project development.*
- *Staff supported an OCFSN member's successful proposal that was submitted to USDA GUSNIP. Federal funding was secured to support two years of SNAP match funding (Double Up Food Bucks) to be shared across Oregon.*

Vital Project 1c.4 Lead Organization: Rogue Farm Corps, OSU Extension

- **Provide farmer training**
 - *Staff provided referrals to Friends of Family Farmers for trainers needed for the Oregon Pasture Network, a community of practice and marketing platform for pasture based, regenerative animal producers. The trainers will provide pasture management education to livestock producers interested in herd management, forage development and maintenance, and soil health in the context of Eastern Oregon.*
 - *A new cadre of beginning farmers was recruited in spring of 2021 for the Rogue Farm Corps program.*
 - *A collaborative proposal to fund coordination of training and support for beginning farmer/rancher was awarded funding from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.*
- **Diversify general food production**
 - *A producer mini grant was provided by Slow Food Wallows for a beginning farmer to invest in equipment for her mushroom growing operation.*

Vital Project 1c.5 Lead Organization: Rogue Farm Corps, OSU Extension

- **Facilitate land acquisition and leasing**
 - *Staff participated in the OCFSN Beginning Farmer Rancher Development team which is continuing work on a pilot technical assistance project looking at the specific needs of Land Seekers and Land Holders and how to assist both parties through a land acquisition or transfer process.*

- *A collaborative proposal to fund coordination of training and support for beginning farmer/ranchers, including development of one-on-one professional technical assistance for land-seekers and landholders needing succession was awarded funding from USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.*
- *The OCFSN Access to Land team had a significant increase in members and participation at our November meeting and land access emerged as a dominant theme across the Food Charter scoping presentations from Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Immigrant and Refugee communities. The team is currently developing a 2021-2022 workplan of priority focus areas. The rate of loss of agricultural land to non-farm uses continues to increase in Oregon, especially in places like Wallowa County where the county has opted to allow subdivision of EFU zoned lands to create new non-farm parcels under HB3326 and development pressures are intensifying.*

Objective 1d: Natural capital and flow of ecosystem services increase

Action: Invest in forest and watershed stewardship

Vital Project 1d.1 Lead Organization: Wallowa Resources

- Investigate opportunities for stewardship contracts on forests within the region
 - *In 2019 Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaboratives voted to merge into a regionally-focused Northern Blues Forest Collaborative (NBFC). Merger goals are to expand reach and effectiveness across both national forests and the surrounding communities and increase efficiencies and capacity. The NBFC, 45+ stakeholder members, continues work on 6 projects, covering 260,000+ acres of analysis and management planning*
 - *The My Blue Mountains Woodland Partnership is prioritizing cross-boundary projects across northeast Oregon and exploring where stewardship contracts and other funding mechanisms would be most effective. The current Wallowa County project, “Wallowa Front Forest Health and Fuels Reduction”, promotes forest and watershed health and fire resilience across 4,200 acres of non-industrial private forestland and 106,000 acres of public land over the next five years (2019-2023).*
- Identify and deliver career-connected training, including for contractors
 - *Wallowa Resources developed an internship/training program for forest management contractors during the summer of 2019. NEOEDD provided a one-day workshop to these potential contractors on how to plan for business start-up, structuring and registering their businesses, and risk-management.*

Objective 1e: Recreation-related manufacturing increases

Action: Use outdoor recreation assets to attract businesses to relocate to the region

Vital Project 1e.1: Lead Organization: City of La Grande

- Identify and develop shovel-ready industrial sites and/or turn-key buildings
 - *Baker City has installed broadband fiber and electrical power to the Elkhorn View Industrial Park.*

Goal 2 – Increase and formalize regional economic development collaboration

Objective 2.a: Region is positioned as more resilient and attractive for residents, businesses, and visitors by building off common characteristics

Action: Provide opportunities for relationship development

Vital Project 2a.1 Lead Organization: Business Oregon, NEOEDD

- Host Oregon Humanities Conversation Projects to provide opportunities for community members to engage in relationship-building
 - *Oregon Humanities curtailed the Conversation Project activities as they were previously structured. A limited number of virtual conversations are taking place on a statewide and regional basis and NEOEDD has shared information on how to participate in those opportunities as they become available.*
- Organize regular/quarterly economic-development events to increase understanding of current and forecasted economic measures and trends/events that could disrupt or influence the economy
 - *Staff is serving on the Technical Advisory Committee for the Wallowa County Economic Opportunity Analysis as part of the Senate Bill 2 process to rezone up to 50 additional acres of land for industrial/commercial use. Staff also served on the Oregon Community Foundation's Rural Community Advisory Team with other representatives from our region and across Oregon.*
 - *Staff is a member of the Eastern Oregon Regional Economic Recovery Team. This group met weekly during the first part of the pandemic and less frequently in 2021. Information in these meetings primarily revolves around business impacts from COVID-19, the federal response and CARES Acts, unemployment rates and unemployment insurance, closures and reopening plans, state resources and funding opportunities and sharing of local information and strategies/response.*
 - *NEOEDD staff is a member of the Regional Solutions-coordinated Eastern Oregon Regional Equity in Recovery Council. This group has focused on those most-impacted by the pandemic and on ways they can be assisted in the short and long-term. Housing, childcare, health disparities, and access to capital have been issues discussed by this group.*

- Provide project development and funding assistance
 - *Staff organized two conversations with EDA staff to discuss potential CARES ACT funded projects with Wallowa Resources and the City of La Grande as project sponsors.*
 - *Staff organized an additional conversation with EDA staff to discuss how EDA programs could help fund a regionally-significant business expansion project.*
 - *NEOEDD assisted three organizations with project development and/or funding assistance, including Elgin Stampedeers Association replacement of community hall, Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center property acquisition and program development. NEOEDD recently agreed to provide contracted services for strategic planning for the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce.*

Action: Explore new and strengthen existing sector collaborations

Vital Project 2a.2: Lead Organization: EOVA

- Increase participation in the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association (EOVA) and the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway committee
 - *NEOEDD agreed to serve on the Steering Committee for a regional Northeastern Oregon’s Rural Tourism Studio workshop, however all RTS workshops have been put on hold. NEOEDD provided a referral to the Business Oregon Regional Development Officer for Chief Joseph Days regarding potential COVID-19 funding for an event center in Joseph that could serve as overflow accommodation in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.*
- Improve internal communication systems among tourism industry providers and supporting agencies
 - *EOVA hosted a Virtual Engagement Series for tourism businesses beginning in early 2021 and promoted participation in the Travel Oregon stakeholder survey. Throughout the year EOVA provided information on multiple training and information webinars for tourism businesses with information on trends for COVID-recovery and COVID funding resources. NEOEDD staff participated in stakeholder meetings with EOVA, and Travel Oregon.*
- Engage in tourism industry planning and project implementation at the local destination-marketing organization level
 - *EOVA continues work to implement their strategic plan, with adjustments due to COVID. They held a series of agritourism round tables for networking, identification of shared goals and priorities, and planning of collaborative projects.*
- Coordinate activities and investment with EOVA and Travel Oregon
 - *While COVID-19 disrupted the tourism industry in nearly all markets, EOVA, as the regional destination marketing organization for eastern Oregon, continues to work with Travel Oregon to keep up to date on industry changes and*

best practices for reopening, implementing the strategic regional cooperative tourism program plan in response to public input, in the broad focus areas of destination development, global sales, global marketing, and global strategic partnerships.

- Engage in regional product development and promotional planning and implementation, including outdoor adventure, bicycling, arts/culture/heritage, agriculture/culinary, and packaged group and international tourism products and marketing campaigns
 - *NEOEDD staff serve in an advisory role for the Joseph Branch Rail with Trail project. Staff assisted with updating of the portions of the trail concept plan and provided letters of support for funding proposals to pay for contracted Project Coordination services at the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium. Staff assisted in reviewing the RFP for Coordination Services and provides referrals for resources and partners on an ongoing basis.*
 - *Staff participated in agritourism roundtable sessions hosted by EOVA.*

Action: Market region to attract industries paying above-average wages

Vital Project 2a.5 Lead Organization: La Grande Urban Renewal District

- Identify and develop regionally significant industrial sites and certified industrial land
 - *NEOEDD staff are participating in a Wallowa County land use project that may result in rezoning up to 50 acres of resource lands for other types of development.*
- Hire consultant to work with partners to develop marketing plan
 - *O TEC is leading marketing efforts through their Golden Shovel project.*
- Utilize coworking sites as magnets for companies that have embraced independent workers and need worksites distant from high-cost metropolitan locations
 - *The Ignite Center for Entrepreneurship in La Grande has been closed for COVID, but just reopened. We currently have interest from 3-4 individuals to work from this location.*

Objective 2b: Eastern Oregon University's role in supporting regional vitality increases

Action: Establish Rural Economic Vitality Center (REV) at EOU

Vital Project 2b.1: lead organization: EOU

- Access resources to establish operations of the REV
 - *The REV is in operation and is providing services and support to connect students with businesses, internships and other collaborative engagement.*

Goal 3. Assess, improve, and utilize infrastructure needed for economic growth

Objective 3a: Energy independence improves and outflow of capital for energy purposes decreases

Action: Move toward distributed and renewable energy

Vital Project 3a.1: lead organization Wallowa Resources, Wallowa Resources Community Solutions Inc. (WRCSI)

- Support project identification, design, and development (including grantwriting, permit applications, etc.)
 - *WRCSI assisted multiple entities with grant writing activities.*
- Invest in Renewable Energy
 - *Local solar panels now produce roughly 6 percent of the energy used in Wallowa County. Wallowa Resources has been convening residents and businesses in discussion on expanding solar options for low and moderate income households and renters and combining solar with battery storage.*
- Design and install micro-hydro projects
 - *Wallowa Resources Micro-Hydro team worked with interested partners to promote free hydro flow measurement and preliminary assessment with costs being funded by Energy Trust of Oregon. They also completed mapping of county irrigation waters over about 46,000 acres of the county's main valleys and then analyzed data to find potential micro hydro sites. They are actively exploring where and how capacity limits to the current local electric grid in some areas of the county are limiting development of renewable energy. The team hosted a series of virtual Small Hydro "Energy Brown Bag" events that were open to the public. They also launched new stand-alone CSI with more comprehensive information on Bio Fuels, Small Hydro and Solar programs as well as unfolding work around Electric Vehicles (EV), Energy Planning and other energy issues.*

Objective 3b: Shared-use community assets are developed and/or improved

Action: Acquire community forestland to ensure the forests continue to generate social, economic, and environmental benefits to the local community

Vital Project 3b.1: lead organization, Wallowa Resources

- Transition existing private or federal public forest land into community-owned forests that will contribute to other diversification strategies
 - *Wallowa Land Trust, lead partner in the Wallowa Lakes Moraines Partnership is working with partners on completing a conservation easement and management plan for East Moraine Community Forest and to raise \$200,000 to implement the management plan, including capital improvements and staffing.*

Action: Create plans to improve municipal infrastructure

Vital Project 3b.2 Lead Organization: Individual governmental agencies

- Conduct a needs assessment for various infrastructure components at the community, regional, or system level
 - *NEOEDD's Resiliency and Recovery AmeriCorps participant investigated infrastructure needs during the development of a regional needs assessment for Covid Recovery.*
 - *NEOEDD staff participated in Joseph State Airport master planning meetings.*
- Create plans to develop municipal infrastructure to support economic growth
 - *The City of La Grande completed design plans to remodel the Historic Fire Station for an entrepreneurial and co-working center.*
- Provide project development assistance and identify funding sources
 - *The City of Richland received a Community Development Block Grant to complete Master Water Planning and NEOEDD provided grant administration services for the project.*
 - *The City of Halfway received a Community Development Block Grant to construct a Fire Station for the Eagle Valley Rural Fire District. They hired NEOEDD to provide grant administration, certified payroll and Environmental Assessment services for the project. The Environmental Assessment is nearly complete and the project should go out to bid for construction this summer.*

Goal 4. Improve, develop, and expand community assets

Objective 4a: Shared-use community assets are developed and/or improved

Action: Build new multi-purpose trails and/or bicycle routes

Vital Project 4a.1:

- Develop pilot segment of Joseph Branch Rail with Trail
 - *An intern from Eastern Oregon University, with assistance from the REV Center, updated portions of the trail concept plan and investigated information and resources needed to proceed with development of the trail segment from Elgin to Lookingglass. Other students have worked on writing grants for funding to support a contracted Trail Coordinator for the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium. Staff is serving on the advisory committee.*
- Conduct a needs assessment for various infrastructure components at the community, regional, or system level
 - *NEOEDD staff are participating in Joseph State Airport master planning meetings.*

Goal 5. Strengthen and/or improve ability of nonprofits and local governments to meet needs and enhance quality of life for the public

Objective 5a: Nonprofit and public organizations are more effective

Action: Improve management systems, internal relationships, and capacity

Vital Project 5a.1:

- Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training
 - NEOEDD hosted two Nonprofit Roundtables online
 - NEOEDD staff provided a program on DEI to Wallowa County Rotary club.
 - NEOEDD organized a DEI workshops for employers in October, November, December, and February.
 - NEOEDD led a four-part Journey to Equity workshop online with tools for assessment, strategic planning, decision-making and communication for organizations seeking help with equity-related changes.
 - NEOEDD sponsored and attended the 10th annual Celebrate, Educate, & Appreciate Diversity Conference at Eastern Oregon University.

Objective 5b: Priority projects are successfully completed

Action: Provide project development and implementation assistance as requested

Vital Project 5b.1:

- Identify potential projects
 - NEOEDD did not issue a new call for project during the year. Oregon's Regional Solutions Coordinator is currently issuing such a call for projects to inform the Governor and Legislature's decision-making related to American Rescue Plan Act funding.
- Conduct feasibility study for projects
 - NEOEDD assisted one organization studying the feasibility of new facilities, a community event facility in Union County.
- Manage project implementation
 - NEOEDD staff assisted with the implementation of three CDBG-funded construction and planning projects in Richland and Halfway and completed BOLI-labor compliance review of a project in Enterprise.

APPENDIX A

NEOEDD's 2021 Community Needs Assessment is incorporated by reference into the 2021 CEDS Update.