

# Finland Minnesota Community Innovation Grant Application – July 2018

**Problem:** Our region is lacking a system and a structure to sustain healthy communities for the long term. The issues our local communities are experiencing have to do with community and cultural intergenerational poverty and lack of access.

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Finns who immigrated to our area were marginalized for cultural and political reasons. They were forced to learn how to subsist from the native people of the area or had to create their own systems to survive; systems such as the Finland Co-op which was created in order to have access to markets, a way to sell local goods and acquire goods from outside the area.

Extractive logging happened in the very early part of the 1900s and then receded to a much smaller scale. Mining was happening on the Iron Range, but it was just far enough away that the Finland area didn't benefit financially or suffer environmentally.

For a brief time, there was a thriving local and regional economy that formed. In the 1950s, serious globalization came to Finland and changed the playing field. The Taconite production plant in the nearby city of Silver Bay and the Finland Air Force Radar Station were built, and mechanization of logging and agriculture made both industries produce fewer profits for fewer people. Many people turned from making a living from the land to this new economic system. In the 1980s Reserve Mining Company shut down its Silver Bay plant and the Air Force abandoned the Radar Station, leaving a vacuum, and forcing a lot of people to leave the area. This is the story of globalization: we find ourselves many years later with a system of poverty instead of a strong local economy. Our community was globalized, and as a result, we have few jobs, high land prices, and lack of access to housing. People have to leave. Young people often have to leave, or have little hope. We lost our economic sovereignty.

Now we are positioned to see the problem and the solution. This major change was recent enough that we still have the threads of the old economic system to pick up from. Not only that, but we are uniquely situated to rebuild our local economy because our corner of Northern Minnesota has been largely ignored by industrial agriculture and by extractive industry (until recently) and remains undeveloped in many ways. Instead of challenging a large corporate structure, we are operating in a bit of a vacuum. This allows us to focus on building systems rather than fighting to be able to build them. We have a good chance for community buy-in, and we have enough structures already in place to support building our local economy using food as a starting point – as a system to create empowered community through the development of sustainable local wealth.

We have no system to rely on, so we have to build one. There is no other option. We can't tap into a system of wealth, we have to create our own, which can serve as a replicable example for many small rural communities throughout the Midwest.

**Breakthrough:** We have to regain our economic sovereignty as a place and as a region. Rebuilding our local economy creates local wealth, rather than extracting it and sending it somewhere else.

**Process:** In order to have sovereignty, people have to have a voice. Our process allows our community to identify problems they want to solve by giving them a voice, and then creating a method to achieve their goals. That democratic process is a tradition in our community, one that we intend to honor throughout the time of this work. The story of how we built our community center is the story of this community process.

**The Story of Finland's Community Center and How Friends of the Finland Community Was Formed:** In 1995, the Town of Crystal Bay (our local municipality) created a planning and zoning board so as to have some jurisdiction over platted roads. The Township also discussed a new community center/recreation building for many years. In the spring of 2003 these two efforts came together and the Township did comprehensive planning to decide where the new community center should be located, and also began to think ahead for the future of the Township.

In February and March of 2003, ten focus groups were organized with 110 participants to discuss visions of the new community center and the future of Crystal Bay Township. At the annual meeting in March 2003, the results from the focus groups were presented and a new committee for the comprehensive planning process was formed. Initially the Comprehensive Community Planning Steering Committee had 8 members including the Township Board of Supervisors. This grew to 16 members to better represent the diverse viewpoints in the community.

During 2003 and 2004, the Comprehensive Community Planning Steering Committee met regularly to draft a vision, goals and strategies. All of the steering committee meetings were open to the public and many were well attended (up to 50 individuals). On February 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 2005, the Town Board held hearings on the Comprehensive Community Plan (Comp Plan) to hear feedback from the community. They made copies of the plan available to the community and asked for written feedback as well. Many constructive comments were received and the main questions raised were about how the plan would be implemented. On March 7, 2005 the Town Board approved the Comp Plan.

The feedback received concerning the new community center was incorporated into the Comp Plan as its own section, and was the first major item put into motion. The former Finland recreation hall had fallen into disrepair and in the fall of 2007, with the help of Lake County, it was demolished. The Township's goal was to build a new community center that would be the model rural, affordable, sustainable community center to serve area residents of Northern Lake County and visitors to the region.

Early on, the Township received support from the Northeast Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership. With these funds, the Township was able to work with Paul Anderson of Partners and Sirny Architecture Firm and the University of Minnesota Center for Sustainable Building Research to obtain schematic designs for the building and to develop methods for incorporating sustainable elements into the new facility.

In turn, the schematic design created allowed the Town to apply for funding from multiple places. In June of 2006, the Township voted to bond itself up to \$750,000 to build the new building. A Community Center Committee met from 2004-2006. In June 2006 the Township moved to officially create two Committees, a fund-raising and a building committee, which met bi-weekly to plan and coordinate the next steps for the building. In August of 2006, Congressman Jim Oberstar visited Finland and spent an hour at the Finland Rec. Hall learning about the hopes and plans for the new Community Center.

In early 2007 the Fundraising Committee decided to officially organize to create a nonprofit in order to be able to apply to a broader range of funding. That was how Friends of the Finland Community was created, with Honor Schauland as the Director and main organizer and fundraiser for the project.

On March 16th, 2007, Finland's St Urho's Day Celebration was organized around the History of the old Finland Recreation Hall, which we knew we would be saying goodbye to in preparation for construction of the new Center. The highlight of the day was a visit from Congressman Oberstar, who rode in the parade, visited the Rec Hall, and then announced that the Township would be getting \$800,000 from the federal government towards the new Community Center, in recognition and memorial of the efforts of Clair Nelson, a recently deceased community leader.

Fast on the heels of that news came the word that the Township would also be receiving a grant for \$97,300 from Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program for the building of the new community center as a facility that could provide information and access to individuals about the natural world in inner Lake County along the Baptism River, a protected trout stream.

The project also received funding from such diverse sources as Iron Range Resources, The Wilder Foundation, NE MN Sustainable Development Partnership, the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, Clean Energy Resource Teams, the Katherine B Andersen Fund of the St Paul Foundation, and many various donations from individuals and businesses. Friends of the Finland Community and Honor Schauand were instrumental in organizing the meetings and building the partnerships that led to these grants for the new facility.

The Community Center opened early in 2011.

After the Center was finished, a construction debt of \$250,000 remained. Thanks to the efforts of Town Clerk Deb Johansen, and County Commissioner Pete Walsh, State Representative Dave Dill was able to secure Taconite Production Tax funds to pay off this debt.

The Community Center is now available for use and rental. It is used virtually every day for a wide variety of activities.

As a community, we created our own process to find, address, plan, and complete our goals. This was not neat and tidy. This was messy at times, and people often disagreed, argued, or offered criticism. The leaders of the project did their best to facilitate communication, address concerns, allow different viewpoints to be heard, and hold space for the community to come to a consensus in order to proceed. The process was democratic. It took a long time, and ultimately made the project and the community stronger in the long run. We may have reinvented the wheel completely, but that was the wheel that we needed to invent in order to get that done. It's our wheel.

It was understood from the beginning that the nonprofit, Friends of Finland, was not formed for the sole purpose of building or managing the Community Center. Friends of Finland's mission is to help our local government implement the vision for the community that was outlined in the Comp Plan. The group works to facilitate change by holding a yearly forum for community input and ideas and also for celebrating community accomplishments. This is an Annual Community Conversation in which around forty to fifty people participate. This is one of the ways we have learned about the problems with food access that our community struggles with, and one of the places where some of the creative ideas to solve those problems have come from.

**Project Process:** For this project, we envision a similar format but related to food with breakout groups working on specific issues (egg production, food buying clubs, food related businesses, co-op restaurant ideas). We would start with a general discussion on where community members shop for food and how

we can increase local purchasing and go from there. These community discussions will help flush out additional community members interested in participating and in turn possible develop "champions" to see them through.

Why food? While this economic system we are building can support the production of many different types of goods and services, food is a unifier. We know we can get significant community buy-in. We've already seen that the organic section is the fastest growing sector at the Finland Co-op. Round River Farm CSA has a long waiting list for shares. The demand for locally produced food is there. There is a lot of effort by a lot of people to produce things that people want, but our current economy doesn't make that profitable or sustainable.

No local egg producer has a hard time selling their eggs. But those producers are operating on nonexistent margins. Our budding local chicken industry has gone as far as it can go with our current situation. These producers are held back from greater success by lack of access, both to markets and to affordable feed.

Each week, the Finland Co-op gets a delivery of fresh bread from Ashland Bakery in Wisconsin (60 miles away as the crow flies across the Lake). The bread sells out immediately. Someone could bake bread more locally, but there isn't access to grain. It's the same issue the chicken producers have. As an example of how things could unfold with the process and system and project we are envisioning, regionally sourced grains could be purchased in bulk and shipped to the Finland Co-op. These grains would not only be used by a local bread baker but could be available in bulk at the Co-op for its members, other local food buying clubs, local livestock producers needing feed, and the grain can be redistributed to other retail outlets along the North Shore and the Iron Range. The Clair Nelson Center's commercial kitchen would be the location for bread production. Having an inexpensive production facility will keep the overall cost down. This has already happened in the past and the space is workable. The final product would be available for sale at the Finland Co-op, Zup's grocery in Silver Bay, local restaurants and other retail outlets along the North Shore. In keeping with Wolf Ridge E.L.C.'s goal of locally sourced foods, all bread products used at Wolf Ridge would be produced right here in Finland. In order to be truly sustainable, this project needs to lift the economy of the whole region.

Not only can we begin to reclaim our community power, we can assist others along the shore, extending our newly designed and tested systems to the numerous and extensive North Shore market for local foods. We can fill the trucks in both directions, renewing and exchanging the ingredients and products to lift us all up together.

**Where we are currently at in the process:** In many ways, we already have a lot of community engagement – more than many other places. People here often participate in community. However, there are more people who need to participate and have their voices heard, especially in relation to the topics of economic sovereignty and food. Some of this work is already happening, what we need now is to increase our capacity to do more in this direction. A big part of that is cycling back to the community for more brainpower, human resources and experience. We need to open up the work happening already around food to the rest of the community to ask for their input and participation. We've begun to have these conversations with individuals and organizations, but a lot more work needs to be done.

Let's take the example of chicken feed: Our local producers have identified a problem with lack of access to quality, inexpensive organic chicken feed. Individually, they can buy chicken feed at the Finland Co-

op. This feed is delivered once a week from Dan's Feed Bin in Superior Wisconsin. Or they can drive to Dan's Feed Bin and pick it up themselves for a lower price. Of course there is still the price of gas to consider. For this reason, folks sometimes pool resources and have one person pick up feed for the whole group. Organic feed is available, again, from Dan's Feed Bin by way of the Finland Co-op. Non-organic chicken feed is less than half the price of organic feed, but the need is for organic. The only organic supplier of chicken feed (or the bulk grain that constitutes the ingredients) is Cashton Farm Supply in Southern Wisconsin. Dan's Feed Bin sells the feed and grains for a reasonable price, but when the Finland Co-op has to pay for the delivery and adds their markup, the cost of organic feed is out of range for most producers in our area. Local chicken people working together have increased collective understanding and tested various solutions. We have expertise in our community from years of trying to figure this out. The Co-op faces the same struggle with supply and transport that chicken producers are having, thus the idea of going about this collectively. One idea that has been tried was to send a community member with a truck directly to Cashton in Wisconsin to get a better price for the whole group. Cashton refused to do business – they do wholesale, not individual sales. Could chicken producers organize group buying power, working with the Finland Co-op in order to create a wholesale market? For that matter, could we buy grain from sources over on the Iron Range and grind it locally? How can that happen? The chicken feed idea is really at the point of testing and implementing solutions, but there is a need to better organize local producers and institutions in order to really figure this out in a way that has the maximum benefit for the whole community.

We've identified the problems. We've begun to increase our collective understanding (though that is ongoing). We are at a point where we have some ideas, and we'd like to test and implement them as beginning solutions, but we recognize that we want and need more ideas and more people to help with testing and implementing them. Again, building capacity.

**Who:** We envision Honor Schauland representing Friends of Finland and the Community Center being the overall Project Coordinator and Facilitator, with Kaare Melby being a Coordinator and main community organizing force for the project. David Abazs will assist with regional partnerships and University connections. Marc Smith will be an advisor. Mike Coyle and Karl Klinker, the management team at the Finland Co-op, will be vital with their knowledge of supply chains and the local market. Chris O'Brien from Wolf Ridge Kitchen will also assist with supply chains and procurement work. Stefan Meyer will be the contact at the OCA Agroecology Center when we need information and class space. All of the current Finland Farmers Market Vendors would be great participants and resources. For any local chicken project, we would contact Celeste Sigmund, Karen Hamilton, Denise Harrison, Lori Walewski, Bonnie Warner, Marcia Todd, and David and Lise Abazs, all of whom are small scale chicken farmers in the area, to ask for their input and participation. We would also publicize that we were meeting or working on a chicken project in order to find people we are unaware of as local chicken producers. Similarly, any discussion on wild rice processing would involve Marc Smith, Gary Kent, Rory Scoles, Elli King, Robert Cunningham, Sandy Maxwell, Nancy and Gary Olson, Matt Tyler, Steven and Amelia George, Tim and Laurie Melby, Kaare and Pam Melby, Eric and Dawn Simula, and many others.

**Activities:**

1 – Coordinators will help to formalize a community steering committee representing individuals, businesses, organizations and local government to assist with developing, prioritizing and implementing projects within the initiative to meet community needs. The Finland Co-op, Community Center,

restaurants from the whole region, area farmers, youth, elders, Wolf Ridge, the AgroEcology Center, and area churches are all groups we would approach and invite to participate. Meetings would be well publicized and would have refreshments in order to make them more inviting. A framework of mileage and per diem will be developed for the Steering Committee to encourage participation. We need the diverse elements of the community represented, especially the more far-flung ones.

2 – Coordinators will assess the food access needs of the community (through interviews and surveys with all of the above listed entities) and work with the Steering Committee to develop an appropriate aggregation and distribution model that meets these needs. The Finland Co-op and Wolf Ridge Kitchen will be major players for this piece of the project, because they have bigger buying power than individuals. Wolf Ridge has recently made the commitment to source 90% of the food for their campus locally, but the definitions and plan for that are still being outlined. Working together, we can use Wolf Ridge's larger purchasing power to help us meet the minimum orders for shipping to make purchasing for the group feasible. Again, an identified need is a space that would allow collective purchasing of grain and a grinder to get a better, direct local farmer group price for chicken feed or local flour and storage options for said items.

3 – The Steering Committee will explore related educational gaps and develop and plan for both classroom and on-the-ground training for residents and visitors. The OCA Agro-Ecology Center and the Community Center can do some of this work, especially when interfacing with the local community. For example, classes on food preservation will take place in the Community Center's kitchen, and workshops on permaculture techniques and classes on what food plant and tree varieties have been tested and found to perform well in our northern climate will take place at the AgroEcology Center. This is also the part of the work that Wolf Ridge is the best at. They are all about that educational component. Their work to showcase their own efforts at deep sustainability, as well as the community's effort, is a big part of how this project will serve as a model for others to follow. They educate hundreds of schoolchildren and adults on the many facets of sustainability every year, and food related issues will soon become a major part of their curriculum.

4 – Coordinators and the Steering Committee will investigate, instigate and develop more home-based business opportunities that will further empower, bring equity and social connectedness. Some research has already been compiled in this regard, but we anticipate that some of the supply chain work will result in jobs or businesses that need little more than a person to step into the role we have already outlined – like the bread baker. Or that with a very basic training class on how to grade and candle eggs, that local chicken producers could legally sell eggs in the Finland Co-op or other regional grocery stores, which would encourage them to increase production, or encourage others to begin a small chicken operation of their own. More of these business opportunities will become apparent as we continue this work.

5 – The Steering Committee members and organizations will develop and build infrastructure needed to achieve these assessed needs. Materials and capital development would be financed by the various stakeholders. There is also a small business revolving loan fund that could be utilized but needs more development. Again, with the example of local grain, if the chicken farmers and bread baker organized themselves they could either purchase the grain grinder together, or take out a loan from the revolving loan fund together.

If we take this example of a locally produced loaf of bread, there is a network of people needed to bring that to fruition. There are grain growers on the Iron Range. David Abazs and Kaare Melby know some of them and can facilitate connections in order to procure the grain. The management team at the Finland Co-op knows about shipping networks and has a little bit of space to store bulk grain, and in addition could work with local chicken producers and other local farmers to compile a larger grain order to make procurement more feasible and benefit a larger cross-section of the community. A small grain grinder would need to be purchased and housed somewhere, which is a capital expense, but if the system could be designed and worked through for maximum economic benefit, the people and businesses involved have the ingenuity and connections to finance that piece. A baker then could utilize the locally grown flour to bake bread. The work has already been done to create the commercial kitchen at the Clair Nelson Center and we have a step-by-step guide for a business startup to utilize.

### **Outcomes:**

**Short term goals – achievable by the end of the grant:** Local eggs in local grocery stores. Reasonably priced organic regionally sourced chicken feed available as a bulk order, and also for sale at the Finland Co-op. At least 2 new food-related businesses in the Finland area. Wolf Ridge able to achieve 50% local food sourcing (local meaning within a 75 mile radius) without disrupting the rest of the local food supply. Collective purchasing success that can be replicated or built upon.

### **Longer term goals – at least 5 years out or hard to predict when we will have measurable results:**

1. Economy: The local economy would be enhanced by jobs created and small businesses created or upgraded. Scalable models and real-life examples of local food business/entrepreneurial startups. The existing kitchen business incubator at the Community Center would be expanded. Surplus produce from Community Center edible landscaping and OCA AgroEcology Center would be donated to local food shelf. Young adults are able to find work in the food and farming sector, or can start their own business with fewer obstacles.
2. Ecology: Our community would become a Model of healthy opportunities and solutions that maintain our resources, keeping our water, air, soil, and living environments clean. Community composting would keep compostable materials out of the waste stream and create viable chicken feed. We would model permaculture and other techniques that build soil, and utilize native plants and crops that are suitable for our unique climate and terrain.
3. Equity: Home and community gardening will provide nutritious low-cost food for families. We would see lower prices and the means for healthier food in the community through community-based wild rice processing or grain grinding for local flour or livestock feed. Organic and healthy food would be affordable for low-income people. Low-cost or free class options or scholarships would be available.
4. Education: We would revive skills of canning, drying, fermenting and freezing homegrown food as a bridge to connect our older population and our youth. There would be more excitement, interest in healthy eating. We would have fewer barriers to healthy eating - cost, access, storage, skills. Community members will know and continue to know how to grow and raise their own food. The Community Center and AgroEcology Center will have tours and classes specifically for elders and youth. Young people will gain valuable practical knowledge that will serve them well throughout their lives.
5. Empowerment: We will be able to lift up "champions" and support their work within this community. We would mentor relationships between youth and adults, especially elders. Everyone is welcome at the table, and there will be a pooling of resources.

**Final Outcome:** Ultimately our local economy is linked to the larger, outside economy. We are always going to want to engage in trade to acquire goods we cannot grow or make ourselves. However, this

project will allow us to regain a great deal more local community control of the means of food production which will create local wealth and keep it circulating within our region, giving us greater independence and resilience in relation to the changing global economy.