

Focusing on Priorities

2021 was characterized by adjustments to changes brought about by the COVID-19 challenges of 2020 but most importantly, it was characterized by recovery. Recovery for small businesses and manufacturers and, many other public and private organizations like Northwest Iowa Development (NWID). NWID represents regional economic development partners in Lyon, O'Brien, Osceola and Sioux Counties, as well as the community of Le Mars, and networking and communication amongst those partners is the foundation of NWID. In 2021, NWID focused on multiple priorities but, most importantly, NWID continued to support efforts to help small businesses and regional manufacturers and made great strides to strengthen the financial stability of the regional organization. A guiding principle of the NWID regional partnership is to take effective, cooperative action together when individual action would be difficult and, less effective. NWID has built a team of volunteers and staff that are proactive, and they put solutions in place in a timely manner. The following represents the focus on regional priorities that NWID carried out in 2021.

2021 Highlights

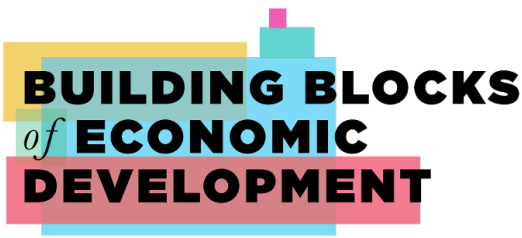


The Dream Big Grow Here program set a standard as a showcase of regional cooperation and reflected a consistent commitment to identify, promote and assist emerging small businesses and entrepreneurs. This program is carried out through a partnership with the Iowa West Coast Initiative, which brings Plymouth, Woodbury, and Monona counties together with NWID counties to form an entrepreneurial support team. This regional team has been working to expand the program in 2021 and have created the new and improved **BIG (Build, Innovate, Grow) Challenge** program. The new BIG Challenge contest for entrepreneurs features a new and enhanced contest website, continued outreach to identify businesses throughout the region and very importantly, increased cash awards for the winning businesses. Finalists will participate in a regional pitch-off competition in November with cash awards going to the winners. Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs is a major priority in a recovering economy and NWID is re-amplifying its efforts to support this dynamic segment of the regional economy.



The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 brought major health and safety concerns and the unprecedented closures of businesses put the survival of many businesses in question. Working together cooperatively, NWID established the first ever **Northwest Iowa Shop Where I Live (SWIL) online marketplace** for regional businesses. In 2021, NWID renewed the partnership with SWIL. To date, 88 regional small businesses participate in the marketplace, establishing virtual storefronts, and they have attracted over 14,000 shoppers to the site. NWID has promoted the marketplace and individual businesses to potential shoppers and more promotions are planned in the future. Promoting small businesses is a priority and helping firms establish an online presence will have a lasting impact.

NWID focuses consistently on our existing business base as a priority. In 2021, we continued to utilize a foreign trade expert to **conduct outreach** to industries **on foreign trade strategies** and promote the benefits of **Northwest Iowa's unique foreign trade zone (FTZ)**. We made direct contact with 25 companies to strategize on how expanding markets in these challenging times can make a huge difference. The first FTZ site in Northwest Iowa was activated in Hawarden in 2020 and is operating successfully. NWID is also working together with IEDA to offer the Virtual Trade Matchmaker program which allows companies to explore products and foreign markets with trade experts to determine expansion possibilities.



BUILDING BLOCKS *of* ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Career Opportunities Beyond Expectations

NWID is a partnership of dedicated local economic development professionals. The core of the partnership is the collaboration and the networking between local partners. In 2021, NWID continued to focus on providing information on best practices and techniques that are considered to be the “**The Building Blocks of Economic Development**”.

NWID offers a year-long monthly schedule of **member “roundtables”** on key topics such as housing, daycare, workforce, site development, marketing and others, giving members opportunities to exchange ideas and approaches that work. Each session features either a panel of regional professionals or an expert outside presenter to discuss specific projects and practices. Collaboration continues to be the key ingredient to making our partnership work and keeps our members on track to meet regional challenges.

In 2021, NWID maintained strong financial support from the counties and communities in the Northwest Iowa region, as well as the strong allies who participate as supporting members. Also in 2021, NWID further enhanced the financial foundation of the partnership by securing U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant funds that are being utilized to expand many of the initiatives discussed above.

Major thanks to our partners at the Northwest Iowa Planning and Development Commission who worked with NWID to develop a plan of action that could be supported with the EDA funds.

Addressing workforce challenges of our regional manufacturers continues to be a NWID priority and a critically important strategy to maintain growth in the region.

NWID supports the advancement, promotion and growth of the **Northwest Iowa Regional Manufacturing Sector Partnership**, which now comprises 22 regional companies and Northwest Iowa Community College. NWID supports the partnership through social media marketing, website development and organizational financial support. In 2021, NWID supported the development of the virtual job shadow video series which promotes high demand career occupations such as welding. These videos will be the focal point of ongoing promotions. In concert with sector partners, the sector’s Manufacturing Career Coach continues to build relationships with our regional high schools to attract students, interns and apprentices towards manufacturing careers. Workforce development is a long-term challenge and NWID works together with industry to meet the challenge.



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