

TAPPING into Community Tourism Potential in Rural Minnesota Communities



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

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OBJECTIVES:

The project assists communities to identify and assess local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development effort. Developing assets can expand regional tourism offerings, help strengthen local economies and foster social capital in communities.

Five small rural Minnesota communities with populations under 1500 are participating in a Tourism Assessment Program (TAP).

The participatory project draws on tourism development, community development and sustainability principles. The original TAP has been used in multiple rural communities in Minnesota. This project modifies the original program in an innovative approach by providing three perspectives of the community's tourism potential: community – visitors – experts.

METHODOLOGY:

Phase 1: Community Inventory

Community residents inventory and assess local tourism assets, using assessment tools from *Community Tourism Development* manual & training from research team.

Phase 2: Visitor First Impressions

Community Teams visit another project community to assess it from visitor's first impression viewpoint. Document findings using assessment tool & photos

Phase 3: Expert Visit

Expert Teams visit each community to conduct asset assessment & facilitate community SWOT analysis

Phase 4: Report & Action Planning

University faculty analyze & bring findings to each community to facilitate action planning.

RESULTS:

Initial findings suggest:

- Communities need assistance to see the breadth of local assets for tourism
- Communities recognize value of regional cooperation
- Seeing other communities through a visitor lens motivates and provides ideas for local efforts
- There is a need to educate residents about the value of tourism
- Communities can better engage the tourism potential of local institutional and organizational assets
- Lack of consistent WIFI in rural areas is problematic for using technology-based tools.

Celebration & Evaluation

At end of the 18 month project communities share actions-to-date and stories at statewide celebration with funders, stakeholders and community teams.

Ripple Effect Mapping will be used to evaluate outcomes and impacts of the program.



CONCLUSIONS:

This project builds on past Tourism Assessment Program experiences in communities in Minnesota but adds new methodology to extend program perspective and evaluation.

It is an 18 month work-in-progress.

Anticipated outcomes include increased community awareness of tourism and development of local projects to help communities "tap" their tourism potential.

Incorporating longer term evaluation processes like REM will guide continuous improvement of interventions to build sustainable local tourism efforts in small rural communities in Minnesota.

The project is a collaboration of the University of Minnesota Tourism Center, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and Extension Center for Community Vitality.

