**PROJECT TITLE: Beltrami County Climate Vulnerability Assessment**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

The Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) is proposing a project centered around completing a Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Beltrami County, which encompasses the Red Lake Tribal region, and looks to foster environmental stewardship in our community. Our proposal addresses the “Air Quality, Climate Change, and Renewal Energy” and “Environmental Education” priority categories determined by the LCCMR. This project will uncover community vulnerabilities by examining 7 focus areas that consist of energy, urban infrastructure, forestry and ecosystems, water quality, public health, social equity, and economic development. In addition, our local university, Bemidji State, has signed the Second Nature’s Climate Commitment and this project would help support their efforts by prioritizing community vulnerabilities. HRDC’s proposal for an assessment contains three main goals and includes: 1) improving and increasing programming in all 7 focus areas, 2) county level resiliency planning (once assessment is completed), and 3) promoting climate work beyond our county by creating a web based climate tool-kit that serves as an example for other rural Minnesota communities. The anticipated outcomes are numerous and directly affect a whole host of variables. For example, the climate assessment will triage where resources need to be directed, within each focus area, to address climate change impacts. The populations involved in our region are underserved and lack capacity to do so without additional support. Our water supplies and ecosystems are integral to our community’s health, so county processes that negatively impact those resources will be addressed and improved. Moreover, due to our location, energy usage is an enormous burden, causing increased emissions and social pressure. Our project will open the door for reducing energy usage by expanding the development of energy efficiency programs, renewables, and clean transportation. Overall, completing a vulnerability assessment allows Beltrami County the opportunity to take climate action to the next level and gives us the groundwork needed to effectively work toward a healthier environment. The Beltrami County Climate Vulnerability Assessment is vital to our area because resiliency planning has become a focus for our university and hospital, local businesses, organizations, and residents. More importantly, Beltrami County is not only an environmental justice area but a very rural community, and climate research is needed as capacity for this type of work is scarce.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1 Title: Research and Compilation of Current Climate Data Activity 1: $161,280**  **Description:**The research and compilation component of our proposal is the starting point to gathering climate data and other county information around the 7 focus areas, which are energy, urban infrastructure, forestry and ecosystems, water quality, public health, social equity, and economic development. Our main objective is to get a solid baseline of current and past data, so we can accurately paint a picture of the vulnerabilities but also uncover trends to show the changing landscape. We will first compile information from local city and county governments, DNR, tribal communities, hospitals, and other organizations in Beltrami County to begin framework development. Following this, we will then fill in gaps using state and federal level climate databases, climate tool-kits, and experts from Bemidji State University.  ***Activity 2 Title: Beltrami County Environmental Tool-Kit (Website)* Activity 2: $ 4,500**  ***Description:***An important aspect of this proposal is the inclusion of a web-based tool-kit that will serve multiple purposes. For starters, it will track the progress of the vulnerability assessment from beginning to end so community members, organizations, and local governments, and other cities can be informed of our work. The purpose of this is to engage our county and garner support for climate resiliency. Next, the website will be a database containing information about the environmental work already completed in Beltrami County and who to contact for that specific project. Lastly, the website will be a “one-stop shop” reference for others to gather information on renewable energy, energy efficiency practices and carbon footprint, resiliency planning, funding opportunities and state programs for an array of environmental programs. We will be employing a web design intern, from Bemidji State University, and will rely on our partnership with all of our collaborators to complete this task.  ***Activity 3 Title: Task Force Creation and Public Engagement Meetings* Activity 3: $9,500**  ***Description:***To ensure project effectiveness and efficiency, HRDC will conduct 5 public engagement meetings over the course of two years and create a small task force for this project. For example, we will ensure we are meeting with community partners and residents in Beltrami County, including Red Lake Tribal Nation, through public engagement meetings. This will give us a “boots-on-the-ground” account for climate change and environmental impacts and allow project feedback from our community members. In addition, there will be a project task force, created at the start of the project, that is planned to be made up of one individual from each partnering organization, the project manager, and any serving interns.  ***Activity 4 Title: Publication of Vulnerability Assessment Activity 4: $4,0000***  ***Description:***The final task in our proposal involves publishing the Beltrami County Climate Vulnerability Assessment. Within this process, there will multiple iterations and drafts but final review approval will come from a combination of the Project Manager, HRDC Executive Director and Board Members, and county officials. The assessment serves as the final step and completion of the entire project.    **ENRTF BUDGET: Total Activity Budget: $ 179,280** |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| |  | | --- | | *1.* Compile and analyze all climate and environmental data for each of the 7 focus areas, so we can uncover the vulnerabilities for Beltrami County and know what the assessment will entail. The outcome is building this awareness around what our community needs are, in relation to climate change, and having the information to create a vulnerability assessment. | | 12/30/2020 |
| *2.* Creating a web-based tool-kit that informs the community on all levels of our environmental work but also becomes a reference to catapult environmental progress | 02/28/2021 |
| *3.* Creating a task force and facilitating public engagement meetings allows us to gain expert knowledge, stick to timeline projections, and ensure the community has buy-in for climate action, while having the resources to start climate resilience planning. | Task Force Completion: 09/2020  Pubic Engagement Meetings: 06/30/2022 |
| *4.* Publication of the Beltrami County Climate Vulnerability Assessment will help the community begin resilience planning and give us a framework for prioritizing resources that address the most needed areas of climate impact. | 06/30/2022 |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

**(1) Bemidji State University, (2) Sanford Heath System, (3) Red Lake Tribal Nation, (4) Beltrami County, (5) City of Bemidji, (6) Bemidji Regional Sustainability Committee, and (7) Minnesota GreenCorps Member**

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

The overall objective of this project is to administer a climate vulnerability assessment in Beltrami County, which is a rural community in the Northwest Region of Minnesota. Due to the remoteness and lack of capacity for projects of this nature, our area has not focused on climate change impacts and vulnerabilities for our community. Our results will not only give us a resource to begin resiliency planning but gives the county the opportunity to assess what issues need the most attention and how we prioritize the resources needed. For rural communities, access to those resources are scarce and lacking so we must be diligent is making the right decision. Having a vulnerability assessment gives us the scientific backing to support allocation and climate action decisions. This project is part of a two phase work plan and intended to provide a vulnerability assessment so resiliency planning by the county and Bemidji State University can begin. Funding for the university is being established, while county level work will be in partnership with HRDC. This will require additional grant work in the future and includes keeping assessment information current. As of now, we project that updates for the vulnerability assessment will be every 5 years. This gives ample time to find funding and support from community partners. Once the assessment is complete, the capacity and financial support needed to keep information new is minimal, due to HRDC’s extensive network reach.