

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

## The GRID

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THE  
GRID

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## Strategic Highlights

The GRID began its year one launch phase in early 2020 just as the COVID-19 Pandemic started to spread to our region. This shifted the planned activities into small business crisis assistance. Amid lock-downs, shelter in place orders, and a myriad of State, Federal and Regional emergency funding opportunities, the GRID jumped into action. Before our official launch, we assisted 27 area businesses. We assisted with applications for funding, shifting marketing and sales to online and delivery, and connections to virtual training and resources.

## Financial Highlights

The GRID was able to secure three grants and applied for a fourth that we are awaiting confirmation on in year one. The three grants totaled \$95,000.00 and paid for the year one activities that are outlined in the GRID's operational plan.

## Operating Highlights

The GRID worked closely with Sourcelink to build out the website, CRM and connection with the WEDC's State initiative Start In Wisconsin. This work was completed in time to be co-launched alongside the state's launch during Wisconsin's #StartupWeek.

## Looking Ahead

The GRID will be launching more virtual training opportunities in new and interactive platforms to connect entrepreneurs and innovators to resources they need to succeed. We are researching additional grant opportunities to continue our year two goals as outlined in our original operating plan.

**Toni Van Doren**  
**Business Solutions Coordinator**  
**Nicolet College & The GRID**

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The GRID was able to apply for and accept three grants in 2020. The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Capacity Building Grant for \$50,000, the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development Grant for \$35,000, and Associated Bank's Community Development Grant for \$10,000.00.

We are currently awaiting the confirmation of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's Entrepreneurship Support Grant, where we asked for \$100,000. That number may be less, as we were told that there were many applications. We are reviewing several new grant opportunities to continue with the GRID's year two goals as outlined in the operational plan.



# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## Statement of Financial Position

Nicolet College currently houses the GRID and uses its staff to complete the GRID's functions, activities, and events. Moving forward the GRID will need to secure funding for a director and any contracted services. The grant dollars, and private donor dollars currently funding year one activities will be spent by August 2021. It is imperative to the growth of the GRID to obtain more, larger, or continued grant and/or donor funding.

## Statement of Comprehensive Income (Profits and Losses)

- Income is currently all grant, donor and in-kind
- Expenses are attributed to: Web development, CRM development, asset mapping, content development, and advertising.
- The College is currently incubating the GRID and using Nicolet Staff to complete the tasks associated with year one activities and goals.

DESCRIPTION	REVENUE	EXPENSES
WEDC Capacity Grant	50,000.00	
USDA RBDG	35,000.00	
Associated Bank Community Grant	10,000.00	
Donor funds	10,000.00	
Website development/creation		18,000.00
CRM Development/Creation		9,600.00
Asset Mapping Liaisons		8,000.00
Virtual training platform		1,600.00
Virtual training videos/animations		8,000.00
Contracted Project Assistance (Chuck Komp)		15,000.00
Contracted Videography, social media content		15,500.00
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>105,000.00</b>	<b>75,700.00</b>

# NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS



## In-coming Expenses

The grant activities and expenses tied to the current funding will be complete by August. Any new or additional training, events, or activities not outlined in one of these grants would require another source of funding.

Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.

-Pablo Picasso

## On-Going Expenses

Currently Nicolet College is incubating the GRID and using Nicolet staff to carry out the majority of the activities. To continue the GRID activities into year two, we should discuss any funding opportunities to help cover the cost of the on-going staff time and project management.

## Future Planning

Several Federal Grant opportunities with the EDA that could support the GRID through years two and possibly three need to be reviewed by the advisory committee. (See attached documents in your year end packet)

# ATTACHMENTS

- GRID Operational Plan Update
- GRID committee update report
  - This document has live links for you to view, please view this document on-line before printing

# GRID 2020

## *Operational Plan Update*

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In 2019, our advisory committee convened and created a three-year operational plan for the GRID. The plan was set up in three phases; Pre-Launch, Launch, and Build to Stand-alone Entity. In this document, I will be referencing the original operational plan, what is completed, what is currently being developed, and areas of opportunity to build. The following categories are highlighted in this update:

- **Programs and Services** - Cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship requires effective education and communication that engages the entire community.
- **Outreach & Marketing** - Marketing of the GRID and its partners should match the GRID's mission statement and organizational goals. It should be inclusive and accessible to all.
- **Financial Plan** - The Grid is to operate revenue neutral with an annual balanced budget.
- **Year One Goals** - Goals and activities that have been laid out are in order of priority, categorized for completion or start by the end of year one. including the transition launch activities
- **Years 2-3 Goals** – Goals and activities that will stabilize and move the GRID into its own entity, with the ability to apply for funding, staff, and activities, while still having the advisory board and partners guiding the direction.



# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

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The goals and activities that were developed in the GRID's original operation plan are highlighted in this section. I have divided the action items into three categories for your review; Completed, In-Progress, and Potential

- **Completed:**

- The GRID will amplify awareness of partner events and host a series of educational, networking, and innovation events throughout the year such as regular open discussions around entrepreneurship, talks by subject matter experts and emerging entrepreneurs to diverse community groups, and no-cost new business workshops.
- The GRID will use a customer relations management (CRM) system to target communications to create awareness of opportunities. Multi-channel digital marketing strategies will drive traffic to the GRID's website which reinforces the value to the community through entrepreneur showcase videos, entrepreneur of the month stories, and regular newsletters.
- The GRID will identify and map resources in the region from the perspective of the entrepreneur, generating an inventory of current resources, opportunities, education and events that pertain to entrepreneurs of all stages.
- The GRID will form partnerships and build systems to network these resources.
- The GRID will identify resource gaps that reflect the needs of the entrepreneurial community and develop strategies to fill these gaps in collaboration with its members.
- The GRID will host a website to provide easy, on-demand access to those resources, opportunities, education and events.

- **In Progress:**

- The GRID will build interest through promotion that emphasizes frequent, natural communications to foster innovation, evolving beyond one-time events and programs. The GRID will organize monthly networking events such as the one-Million Cups program, Meetup virtual meeting spaces, entrepreneurship fairs, and “shark tank” events to connect the entrepreneurial community.
- The GRID will support entrepreneurs through a combination of virtual and physical spaces generating organic connections and encouraging networking to stimulate creativity, build community, and support start-up.

- **Potential:**

- In partnership with Nicolet College and K-12 districts the GRID will offer education for the emerging entrepreneur, possibly including a collegiate entrepreneur organization, entrepreneurial scholarships and new venture competitions. Creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem that connects business builders to resources requires understanding and networking the resources entrepreneurs need and providing multiple ways to access these resources when they are needed.

As the GRID continues to grow and develop there will need to be additional goals, activities, and programming plans added to the operational plan. There are several new partnerships, grants and programming connections that are outlined in the 2020 opportunities document attached to your GRID 2020 packet for your review.

# OUTREACH & MARKETING

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This section will review the key messaging that was decided upon in the 2019 operational plan. “ *Key messages: The messaging for the GRID should be consistent and clear through our own marketing and the marketing we do with partner organizations. The GRID is not an umbrella organization, it is a connector of resources and partners and marketing should make this clear. GRID should also contribute to the national entrepreneurial conversation, by highlighting stories of innovation in the region, creating content that shares best practices, and brings resources to the community that were not perceived as available before.*”

I have categorized the activities outlined in the 2019 operational plan by: Completed, In-progress, and Potential for your review:

- **Complete:**

- Media advertising (newspaper, magazine, television, radio)
- Content channel (on the website or a media aggregate like Medium,etc) that promotes learning
- Joint advertising with other organizations
- Word of mouth
- Digital marketing such as social media, newsletters, blogging
- Provide limited free consultations
- Partner with Workforce Development Board, SBA. SBDC, WPI, Chambers and others on regional marketing efforts

- **In Progress:**

- Sponsor/co-sponsor community events
- Host free informational talks/networking events either at business or organization partners

- **Potential:**

- Direct mail/email campaigns
- Conferences
- Fixed Signage

# FINANCIAL PLAN

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This section will review the financial planning opportunities as outlined in the 2019 operational plan. As stated in our operational plan: *“GRID operations will generate only a small portion of operational funds as most events and communications will be made available for little or no cost to the Northwoods community. Funds will be secured from economic development entities, local governmental agencies, grants, and private philanthropy. In-kind contributions of partners will offset operational costs, particularly in initial years.”* The activities are categorized in three areas for your review: Completed/Year 1, Projected, and Potential

- **Completed/Year 1:**

- Prior to launch, funding for the critical year-one operations will be secured.
  - In-kind Nicolet College
  - Other Partners (partnered with OCEDC and VCEDC on several ventures)
  - Direct funding/Private Donors (Eye on Entrepreneurship, Dave Juday)
  - Grants (WEDC, USDA, Associated Bank, Ahlstrom Munksjo)

- **Projected:**

- Funding to complete projects as listed in operational plan for year two and funding to move GRID into a stand-alone organization by year three.
  - WEDC Entrepreneurial Services Grant (applied/will know by Dec. 2020)
  - EDA Sprint Grant (applied Nov. 2020, will know by Jan 2021)
  - EDA/WEDC Incubation Innovation Center funding (research phase)
  - EDA Entrepreneurial Grant (application phase starts Jan. 2021)

- **Potential:**

- Funding to move the GRID into a stand-alone organization, have staff, and complete goals and activities as outlined in operational plan and by advisory committee recommendation.
  - Partnership opportunities with Create as they move to a state wide umbrella organization
  - Research membership fee organizational structures as option

## YEAR ONE GOALS

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This section will review the pre-launch and launch year one activities and goals as outlined in the 2019 operational plan. The activities are categorized in three areas for your review: Completed, In Progress, and Potential

### Completed:

- Identify partner organizations, stakeholders, and investors
  - Define each and what the partnership looks like
- Create advisory committee and host quarterly meetings and any other meetings as needed
  - Create guidelines for committee
  - Define and explain roles
  - Keep accurate meeting minutes of suggestions, ideas and concerns
- Create website
- Create Asset Map (this has begun, but will be constantly evolving)
- Market the GRID by:
  - Monthly Newsletter
  - Have printed marketing materials
  - Cross promotion at partner events in year one (partner and host events in following years)
- Social media
  - Create Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter accounts
  - Post weekly on each account something relevant and interesting to keep followers engaged
  - Blog and YouTube channel highlighting local entrepreneurs
- One on one informational meetings with area partners and investors

### In Progress:

- Use CRM to document individuals, businesses, partners served and job creation numbers
- Constant contact email marketing campaigns
- Find funding opportunities for year 1 and following years
- Host informational sessions and focus groups with area businesses

### Potential:

- Host informational meetings with High Schools and Fab Labs

# YEARS TWO – THREE GOALS

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This section will review the activities and goals for the following two years as outlined in the 2019 operational plan. The activities are categorized in two areas for your review: In Progress and Potential

### In Progress:

- Attend partner events and promote the GRID (this is a continuous activity)
- Connect with SBDC, SBA to have outreach opportunities in our region
  - Virtual one on one sessions with SBDC/SBA reps have started in 2020 and will continue through 2021 virtually with the possibility of in-person when safely able.
- Develop concierge type service – “navigator”
- Connect with and Support the chapter of SCORE nearest to our area
- Create GRID committees: Events, Marketing/Content, and Mentorship

### Potential:

- Find opportunity to partner with Create Portage County on their regional expansion efforts
- Find larger funding/grant opportunities to continue to grow programming and services
- Work with WEDC and EDA on innovation/incubator funding for space at the College
- Create signature GRID events and create an events plan for following year(s)
- Create youth entrepreneurship pathways and programming
- Research opportunities for growth, expansion, and areas of need
- Help the organization establish itself separate from the college’s incubation
  - Find dedicated staff/director

**Activity and Committee Updates:****\* Website committee:**

Website Update: The website is live! [www.thegridwi.org](http://www.thegridwi.org) is operational and will continue to be updated with the latest content, events, and success stories. It has features to collect information for events, marketing, and newsletter distribution. Please take a moment to look over the site and give the website work group your feedback.

**\*Innovators in action has taken the place of Business/Entrepreneur and Artist of the Month.**

Check out all of the highlighted innovators in action by looking at our youtube channel:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCywxjplPO6rKVMB\\_QTbGgKw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCywxjplPO6rKVMB_QTbGgKw)

We highlight the most recent videos on the youtube channel, the website, and our social media pages:

<https://www.facebook.com/THEGRIDWI/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-grid-wi>

<https://www.pinterest.com/thegridwi/>

[https://twitter.com/grid\\_wi](https://twitter.com/grid_wi)

**Grants committee:**

The GRID received the WEDC Grant Capacity grant for \$50K, the USDA RDBG grant for \$35K, and Associated Bank Community Grant for 10K. These grants helped support the first phases our project. Including the completion of the asset map by finding, recording and connecting the area resources in our entrepreneurial ecosystem and making them available through the website and CRM build, and virtual programming that will be up in January. We have applied for the Entrepreneurial Support Grant through the WEDC which we should be hearing about in December, the ask for that grant was \$100K, we believe we will be awarded the grant at half the ask. We will update on that award as soon as specifics are available. We have also applied for the EDA Sprint grant. That application was for 200K for COVID recovery projects for the food/hospitality/retail sectors most affected by regulatory and safety measures that have limited their normal business practices by giving them boot-camp style training opportunities to innovate new sources of revenue. The grant was submitted on December 1<sup>st</sup> and we will know more in 60-90 days on the activity of that ask. There are a few other opportunities for grants that will need to be discussed at the next advisory committee meeting.

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**Events committee:**

The events committee needs assistance. We now have the website and social media and email tools to do great promotions of events. It's the perfect opportunity to change this committee and really make it what it needs to be: Cultural and Community Engagement. We have asked Melinda Childs to lead the committee and to find committee members to move our activities and goals forward. We are looking to do more virtual events. Please let us know if you or someone at your organization would be generous enough to devote a little time for this very fun and rewarding committee.

Events that were completed pre-launch:

-We partnered with the SBDC on an event series for businesses affected by the VERSO Mill closure. Those events were held on three occasions in August.

-We partnered with Mark Speirs from the SBDC to host virtual one on one sessions with local businesses in August, September, October and November. We were hosting Mark in person at Nicolet for these sessions prior to COVID but now we are resuming them through private zoom meetings. We have had 9 businesses attend these sessions so far. He has agreed to continue these zoom events in 2021.

-We held two sessions with the Wisconsin Procurement Institute and SBDC in July. The a.m. session was specifically designed for municipalities, county boards, and city councils to learn about federal funding, the CARES Act, and about how to place bids for services and hire local contractors for those services. We had 10 participants for that event. The afternoon session was for business owners to learn about the SBDC, funding opportunities and how to get contracts working with their local, county, and state governments. We had 27 participants on that event.

-The GRID/Nicolet was a partner for the 14<sup>th</sup> annual government opportunities business conference held virtually in June. There were several hundred people registered for this live/virtual event.

Events the GRID is partnering in December:

-The GRID and Nicolet College are partners in the Governor's Marketplace event in December.

<https://app.hopin.to/events/marketplace-2020>



**Other Updates:**

- Work is continuing on the CRM and outreach to area start-ups and community connectors. We will be reaching out for focus groups on resources for our asset map and used to connect these local small businesses and entrepreneurs regarding our upcoming programming, planning, and newsletter.

-The GRID has continued COVID-19 resources for small business and employees and made We also offered one on one sessions for anyone interested. The GRID has continued to post opportunities for webinars, trainings, zoom trainings, and grant and loan information through our social media outlets and direct emails to those who requested more information.

-Updates on The GRID two social media private groups: Remote working 101 and Leading Through Crisis.

**Remote working 101:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1074917056197866/>

Daily content, 125 members and growing

**Leading Through Crisis:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/823136974848179>

- Page is run by Instructor Tamarr Vollmar and has 22 members (74 people attended the free online 4 part event)

-The GRID was a member of the Northwoods Think Tank group that was created by our partners, Grow North and UW Extension. The group is discussing the opportunity for growth for our region post-COVID. From this meeting a need arose for the creation of a community resource asset mapping project that Melinda Childs is spear heading and can update us on at the next meeting. Brittany Beyer and Myles Alexander can keep us updated on the progress from the work that is being done and share the results of their survey data they have collected at the next meeting.

-We meet with Greg Wright from Create Portage County regarding their vision and plans for a regional effort for connecting entrepreneurial ecosystems throughout the state. Greg would like to present to the advisory committee in January regarding their vision, mission and goals and how those may align with the GRID. There is opportunity to possibly have the GRID under the Create umbrella. This may be something to consider rather than creating our own 501c3. Greg will present about their initiative and we can decide if we feel like it may worth further research.

-We will be meeting with the Wausau Entrepreneurial Center on December 8<sup>th</sup>. They will be giving a tour of the facility and discussing the WEDC/EDA funding that helped to pay for their innovation center and how the GRID may be able to apply for something similar. Jim Rosenberg set up the connection and has floated the idea of having an innovation center at the college with the EDA office and they felt positively about the prospect. More information gathering and research to this idea will be needed before moving forward. If anyone would like to attend the tour on December 8<sup>th</sup> please let me know and I will forward you that invitation.

- The work with the Associate bank grant funds has begun. Using new virtual interfaces to our advantage, we decided to work with a small start up animation company out of the Twin Cities We contracted with Squawk Production to produce both a short animated "commercial" to launch the GRID as well as graphics and intro videos to each topic in our training series. The final product will be digital animated content that can be used as marketing material and to guide people through our training series. The second phase of this project is to plug the videos and still graphics onto an interactive website that will house a variety of training materials. Instead of creating a series of zoom lectures we opted for more of an online toolkit approach that integrates presented content, downloadable materials, and live Q&A sessions in a fun and enticing creative way. Participants can access the website anytime. When they visit they can click around a northwoods scene to different areas of interest according to workshop topics. In each section they can view the intro videos, view a recorded presentation on each topic, and download materials. One special "workshop days" live zoom "open house meetings" will be set up for participants to speak one on one with the presenters to have a more personalized experience. These Q&A sessions will be recorded and then available on the website. This project will allow of cross promotion of the workshop series and the GRID initiative itself and creates a recognizable imagery that presents the GRID in a fun yet professional way. The promotional video is currently in production, nearly finished. The teaser videos and website are through preliminary design phases and are in the process of integrating creative design elements with website design. Completion is expected shortly after the new year.

If anyone has any thoughts, ideas or updates they would like to share please feel free to email me and I can get that on our GRID task list as well. As always I appreciate your time and dedication to this initiative, it couldn't happen without you.