

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

The GRID

info@thegridwi.org

www.thegridwi.org

715.365.4425

PO Box 518, Rhineland, WI 54501

THE
GRID



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HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Highlights

The GRID focused on continuing to cultivate our strategic partnerships and build out our network of resources, and continue to identify hidden community connectors, and partner with organizations with similar missions, visions and values. We have built pathways to creative entrepreneurship initiatives through our work with Create Portage County and Arts Wisconsin. Partnered with state-wide missions to create better connections through Start In Wisconsin. We built national and inter-national connections through our presentations at NACCE and our work with Mash Up Lab Canada. And we increased our outreach and visibility by having news of our work published in several entrepreneurial based publications.

Financial Highlights

The GRID completed the work and funds that were secured through the three grants we were awarded in 2020 and applied additional grants in 2021, two that we have received and a third that we are awaiting confirmation on in 2022. The three grants we applied for totaled \$1,045,00.00 and will pay for activities that are outlined in the GRID's operational plan for year three (2022) and also into year four (2023).

Operating Highlights

The GRID was able to serve/reach 954 people and 726 businesses in 2021. We held 14 events, 4 classes, and partnered/assisted/marketed on 59 events and activities. The GRID completed the activities and projects directed by three grants we received in 2020.

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 three goals as outlined in our original operating plan and subsequent 2020 strategic plan.

Toni Van Doren
Manager of Innovation & Business
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. These grants completed their work in 2021. In 2021 the GRID received another Community Development Grant from Associated Bank for \$10,000.00 and \$1M from the SBA Community Navigators Grant. We also applied to the WEDC for an additional 35,000.00 that we are still awaiting announcement.



**Community
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Pilot Program**



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FINANCIAL NOTES

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 be working to secure funding for a director and any contracted services. The grant dollars, and private donor dollars currently funding our activities will be spent by November 2023. It is imperative to the growth of the GRID to obtain and sustain 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	Received	Applied (Awaiting Notice)
2020-2021 WEDC Capacity Grant	50,000.00	
2020-2021 USDA RBDG	35,000.00	
2020-2021 Associated Bank Community Grant	10,000.00	
2021-2022 Associated Bank Grant	10,000.00	
2021-2023 SBA Navigators Grant	1,000,000.00	
2022-2023 WEDC Entrepreneurial Support Grant		35,000.00
Totals:	1,105,000.00	35,000.00

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 2021

Operational Plan Update

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 two (2021) Goals** - Goals and activities that have been laid out are in order of priority.
- **Year three (2022) 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 advisoryboard and partners guiding the direction.

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

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 2021 opportunities document attached to your GRID 2021 packet for your review.

OUTREACH & MARKETING

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 plan and 2020 strategic planning sessions 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) 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
 - Sponsor/co-sponsor community events
 - Host free informational talks/networking events either at business or organization partners
 - Direct mail/email campaigns
 - Fixed Signage

- **In Progress:**

- Activate more streams of digital media marketing such as: Instagram and Tik-Tok
- Map physical innovation, incubation, and creative spaces throughout the Northwoods to connect to entrepreneurs, inventors, creatives and remote workers to the space they need when and where they need it as the next level of our asset mapping.
- Partner with Create Portage County and the Wisconsin Arts Council on a series of events as part of their grant funding through the EDA and WEDC.

- **Potential:**

- Host Entrepreneurial Conferences
- Host k-12 versions of courses, educational offerings and events
- Create an Entrepreneurs Club such as One Million Cups

FINANCIAL PLAN

This section will review the financial planning opportunities as outlined in the 2019 operational plan and subsequent 2020 strategic planning. 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, Projected, and Potential

- **Completed:**

- In-kind Nicolet College
- Other Partners (Founding partners and several additional partners added)
- Direct funding/Private Donors (Dave Juday NET Program Scholarship Fund)
- Grants (WEDC, USDA, Associated Bank, SBA)

- **Projected:**

- WEDC Entrepreneurial Services Grant (applied/will know by Jan. 2021)

- **Potential:**

- Partnership opportunities with Create as they move to a state-wide umbrella organization
- Research and Review upcoming EDA grants
- Wisconsin Innovation Grants Round Two (coming Spring 2022)

YEAR TWO GOALS (2021)

This section will review the pre-launch and launch year one activities and goals as outlined in the 2019 operational plan and subsequent 2020 strategic planning sessions. The activities are categorized in three areas for your review: Completed, In Progress, and Potential

Completed/Continuous:

- Continue to identify partner organizations, stakeholders, and investors
- Hold advisory committee and host quarterly meetings and any other meetings as needed
- Keep website updated and functioning properly
- Keep accurate and updated information in the asset map
- 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
 - Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter accounts
 - Post weekly on each account something relevant and interesting to keep followers engaged
 - Website Blog and YouTube channel highlighting local entrepreneurs
- Use CRM to document individuals, businesses, partners served and begin to track job creation numbers
- Constant contact email marketing campaigns
- Find funding opportunities for following years
- Host informational sessions and focus groups with area businesses

Potential:

- Host informational meetings with High Schools and Fab Labs

YEAR THREE GOALS (2022)

This section will review the activities and goals for the following year as outlined in the 2019 operational plan and subsequent 2020 strategic planning sessions. 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 started in 2020 and continued through 2021 virtually with the possibility of in-person again when safely able.
- Develop concierge type service – “navigator”
- Connect with and Support the chapter of SCORE nearest to our area
- Create GRID committees: Events, Viability, and Mentorship
- Identify the opportunities to partner with Create Portage County and Arts Wisconsin on their regional expansion efforts

Potential:

- 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

Activity Updates:

*** Visibility – Digital Marketing:**

Website Update: www.thegridwi.org 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 us your feedback.

***Website overview for 2021:**

Website views, total 2021 – 5,070
 Webpage users, total 2021 – 1,620
 Month with highest activity: June and September
 Most visited pages: Home page, Events, About Us

***Innovators in action continues with monthly installments highlighting area entrepreneurs and innovators.**

Check out all of the highlighted innovators in action by looking at our Website page: <http://thegridwi.org/> and our youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCywxjplPO6rKVMB_QTbGgKw
 We highlight the most recent videos on the 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

***Social media overview for 2021:**

Facebook: 723 followers, and 671 page likes
 -Facebook Groups:
 Remote Working 101: 143 Members
 Leading through Crisis: 20 Members
 Linked In: 20 followers, 39 visitors
 Pinterest: 3 followers, 108 re-pins of content
 Twitter: 750 impressions/views (no followers or re-tweets)
 Youtube: 7 Subscribers, 25 videos, 948 views (videos have significantly higher views on facebook)
 -Highest viewed videos: Butcher Shop Bakery, New North Magazine and Ahlstom Munksjo

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Events:

We are looking for your assistance in creating and active Events Committee for the GRID. We have the website and social media and email tools to do great promotions of events. It's the perfect opportunity to create a committee to move our event offerings forward. 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.

Recap of Events and Education in 2021:

-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 and possible in-person events in 2022.

-We marketed, and/or partnered on 59 events in 2021.

-We hosted a lunch and learn series over three months which covered topics that any start-up or existing business could benefit from with professional speakers from throughout the community. We had 54 participants that attended one or more of those sessions.

-We hosted 4 non-credit educational sessions in 2024. One virtual NET Class, which had 18 participants, One Hybrid NET Class which had 6 participants, one virtual incubator session that had 8 participants, and Covid Resilience for Business Class that had 33 participants.

-Nicolet held Credit Business, and Entrepreneurial Courses. Numbers on enrollment will be sent in 2022 updates.

-We partnered on a virtual Northwoods Resilience Event in the spring with WEDC, WPI, and Grow North. That event had 10 participants.

-We spoke about the GRID and our processes, progress and area businesses at 3 conferences in 2021, one regional, one State-Wide, and one National. We also spoke to the Wisconsin Technical College System and to the Sourcelink Group we are a part of.



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.

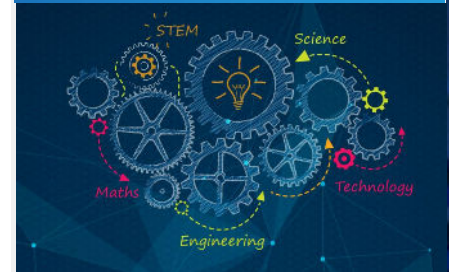
-The GRID has continued COVID-19 resources for small business and employees and made We also offered one on one sessions for anyone interested. The GRID has continued to post opportunities for webinars, trainings, zoom trainings, and grant and loan information through our social media outlets and direct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

-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. Brittany Beyer and Myles Alexander can keep us updated on the progress from the work that is being done and share more at the next meeting.

-We have been meeting with Greg Wright from Create Portage County regarding their vision and plans for a regional effort for connecting entrepreneurial ecosystems throughout the state. There is opportunity to possibly have the GRID under the Create umbrella.

-We applied for and received the SBA Community Navigators Pilot Grant Program. Out of 700+ applications nation-wide 51 applicants were chosen and ours was one. We will work the next few years with 7 spoke partners on free, one-on-one personalized services, educational opportunities and assistance for area business builders to grow, build and succeed in the Northwoods. This grant program also funds two positions for the GRID, a project coordinator and an operations specialist. We are excited to begin interviews for these positions in the new year.

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- The work with the Associate bank grant funds has begun. Using new virtual interfaces to our advantage, we decided to work with our partners at Mash Up Lab Canada to offer their Virtual Incubator for Indigenous Businesses. In collaboration with Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council and three area Tribes, we hope to be able to begin marketing the opportunity early this spring.

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.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication in 2021 and I look forward to working with you all in the new year!

~Toni

