

Region 2 Planning Commission

Serving Hillsdale, Jackson and Lenawee Counties

Project Narrative

CARES Act Supplemental EDA Award Invitation Response | ED20CHI3020008

June 22, 2020

The Novel Coronavirus (i.e., COVID-19) — and the statewide social isolation policies instituted to mitigate its effects — will continue to impact the communities comprising the Region 2 Area until a vaccine is developed and readily available. The full effect of this Catastrophic Incident — an Economic Disaster as well as a Public Health Emergency — on small businesses/institutions and their employees, customers, and other beneficiaries is yet to be determined. For example, it is likely that the impact of the Pandemic on Michigan's School Aid Fund and Revenue Sharing Program will diminish the funds school districts and local units of government, respectively, have to serve their constituents. Moreover, it is likely that unanticipated costs related to the disaster will continue to become apparent for years.

COVID-19 — and the associated stay-at-home order — has also revealed systemic problems in how many local businesses/institutions function. For example, many restaurants and other retail shops do not have a business plan, lack the tools needed to operate on thin margins, and have insufficient savings. Although many local manufacturers currently employ these tools (at least to a certain extent) economic downturns still threaten them. Many of them supply the automotive industry, further exacerbating the risk. This proposal includes:

The Region 2 EDD

Although the District —comprising 90 local units of government in south-central Lower Michigan along the common border with Indiana and Ohio— is a largely rural, it contains the Jackson Urban Area and the Urban Clusters of Adrian and Hillsdale. Parts of the EDD are also within commuting distance of larger urban areas, including Ann Arbor, Lansing, Metropolitan Detroit, and Toledo.

A strong EDO serves each county and the R2PC is a relatively young EDD (i.e., designated in November of 2012). Given these factors, it has always been the goal of the EDD to complement, rather than replace, the services already provided by the EDOs.

Launching of an easy-to-use interactive website

The EDD will design the online resource to function as a trusted local one-stop-shop (i.e., single point of contact) that businesses/institutions can utilize as they recover from the effects of COVID-19 on their operations. This will be an attractive alternative to the current deluge of individual offers of assistance small businesses/institutions currently receive and are most likely too busy to research/implement independently.

Website Design/Maintenance. The website will be serve as an interactive portal regarding up-to-date information from Material Experts regarding human resources, legal counsel, accounting, health and safety, and finance issues regarding the continuing market changes driven by COVID-19. It will also link to pertinent and up-to-date Federal, State, and Local Resources available for COVID-19 responses as well as provide the information normally contained on a

website. A Point-of-Registration Module, for both Material Experts and their clients, will help to make the consultation between them more productive and efficient. The contractor will also maintain the website and ensure its dependability and functionality.

Database Management. The vendor will create a database from Point-of-Registration Module data that will provide specific reporting information on the businesses receiving assistance and what services they received. The contractor will also train the Disaster Recovery Coordinator and the various Material Experts to make their own updates in a timely manner and be available to assist them as needed.

Implementing other R2PC CEDS goals

The EDD is also taking the opportunity to implement other CEDS goals as they relate to the Pandemic. This includes goal #4 — diversify the economy — and its pertinent associated strategy — promote the value-added processing of agricultural goods produced in the Region — given COVID-19’s impact on eateries and their local suppliers. That work will also contribute to the CEDS update scheduled for 2021, including an economic resiliency section/appendix.

Hiring a Principal Economic Development Planner/Disaster Recovery Coordinator

Region 2 will hire an Economic Development Principal Planner who will serve as the Disaster Recovery Coordinator for the grant period and then transition into managing the R2PC’s Partnership Planning grant. As the Disaster Recovery Coordinator, they will provide needed assistance to businesses/institutions throughout the Region 2 Area by doing the following:

- Coordinating efforts among the three countywide EDOs (Economic Development Organizations) to improve efficiency and minimize duplication (i.e., function similarly to an air-traffic coordinator or a hotel concierge);
- Working with the website contractor on its development/maintenance, facilitating online (and other) communication between the various Material Experts and their clients, and maintaining and reporting on website metrics; and
- Working with other EDD staff to develop an economic resiliency section/appendix for the CEDS and other CEDS goals with a relationship to resiliency.

Funding is set aside to allow the Economic Development Principal Planner attend training sessions, such as the EDA University Center Showcase, and to purchase a laptop computer and associated equipment that will allow him/her to make presentations and to telecommute.

The approach outlined above will help local businesses/institutions become economically sustainable in the aftermath of the current Catastrophic Incident and more resilient when future disasters strike. Consequently, it will foster Transformative rather than merely Marginal change in response to the current crisis. The effort will be facilitated by a Disaster Recovery Coordinator who will listen to local needs in order to identify Thick solutions tailored to a unique situation as well as the more universal Big solutions advocated nationally/statewide (but may have limited local applicability).

