

**COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF DAY  
COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA: BUILDING AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAM**

An Abstract of

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by

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## Abstract

This applied thesis project describes a variety of projects that were organized and implemented during a Peace Corps Fellow (PCF) Community Economic Development Internship spent in Day County, South Dakota. It demonstrates how the PCF was able to coordinate community development projects, design and develop a community economic development program and integrate both efforts to form an institutional framework to promote economic and community growth throughout Day County. The Day County area resembles many towns throughout the Midwest and northern plains. This region struggles with a variety of social and economic conditions, compounded by severe flooding. Like many rural communities, Day County lacks the human, entrepreneurial, financial, and business recruiting capacity and is therefore unprepared for community and economic development. Many rural communities have a base of dedicated volunteers, but they lack strong leadership skills and planning knowledge to take action. Local citizens also have a critical need for training in management, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Before the arrival of the PCF, there was no full time community economic development planner in Day County. Because of the challenges facing the area, local leaders decided they needed a planning professional that could manage their developmental. Consequently, they decided to hire the PCF whose goal was to create a professional planning framework for promoting development. Once established in the Day County area, the PCF was assigned to conduct a needs assessment of the region, develop community and economic development programs and increasing the number of volunteers in the community through a range of projects.

Essentially, the PCF was hired to create a more professional planning presence in local communities. The PCF did this by working to increase the social capital in communities—that is the willingness of local residents to volunteer their time, physical labor, and finances—to improve the quality of life in the community (Putnam 1995). Social capital has been defined as the “local networks, norms and social trust” in a community that forms a basis for community development (Putnam 1995, 67). Communities with high levels of social capital are better able to recruit volunteers and generate revenue to complete local development projects because there is a shared feeling in the community that a collaborative effort can make significant, positive changes. As a result, the PCFP sought to increase the social capital and local development capacity in rural communities by recruiting a broad cross-section of local residents, including senior citizens and students from local universities, to perform tasks in pursuit of community objectives.

During the internship, the PCF mobilized the community to develop a strategic plan that identified a range of community economic development projects. Examples of projects implemented include a strategic planning initiative, strategies to build community consensus, a business retention and expansion (BR&E) program, tourism promotion, marketing value-added agricultural opportunities, assistance given to small business start-ups and exploring and securing outside economic development funding sources—including increased loans and grants received from State and Federal government agencies.

This applied thesis project documents an innovative response to the needs of rural South Dakota. It draws on the demonstrated skills, education and experience of a PCF who is well equipped to train local residents and coordinate community projects.