

MODULE 5:

Evaluation and Reflection



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In this module, we will cover the recommended evaluation of the FORWARD program. As an Extension professional, you can plan to conduct multiple iterations of evaluation. Different entities will see the FORWARD program through their own perspectives:

Perspectives of Program Evaluation



Therefore, the evaluation process is compartmentalized in three dimensions. The first dimension is the curriculum knowledge gained, second dimension is stakeholder input and the overall process, and the third dimension captures the outcomes generated from this effort. Depending on the situation, some communities may be building stronger workforce development ecosystems, others may be able to strengthen existing pathways and some may complete the development of new career pathways. Regardless of where the community ends up as a result of this effort, there are evaluation opportunities to capture impact.

Dimensions of Program Evaluation

First dimension	Short-term outcomes	Immediate evaluation: Assess knowledge and awareness gained
Second dimension	Medium-term outcomes	6-12 months: Stakeholder input to assess process
Third dimension	Long-term outcomes	12-18 months: Ripple effect mapping of program impacts

First Dimension: Immediate Assessment

Half-page immediate evaluations will be conducted at the conclusion of each module. The purpose of these assessments is to measure level of awareness and knowledge gained in relationship to the module's learning objectives. These are to be completed by the task force members and collected by the Extension professional. The assessments are posted in the Appendix of this section.

As an Extension professional, these half page assessments can be used for your program evaluation – both at the local and state level. More information on ways to document your efforts is listed in the Educator Resources section.

Second Dimension: Stakeholder Input

The second dimension can be viewed as a ‘check-in’ to determine what is going well versus what needs to be fine-tuned. Depending on the community’s efforts, the amount of evaluation conducted at this level will be situational in nature. Below are several recommendations on how to gather stakeholder input six to twelve months after the start of this effort.

Focus group

The purpose of this focus group is to gather input on the community process and the curriculum. This step is the midpoint between the assessments completed at the end of the modules and the ripple mapping conducted at the 12–18-month mark since the start of the FORWARD program. Between six to twelve months, a focus group is to be convened. Focus group attendees should include the workforce development partnership team that was convened by you to implement this program. An hour will likely be enough time to address the following questions:

1. What did you perceive as the purpose of the FORWARD program?
2. What key lessons did you learn from this process that could help the community in the future?
3. What pieces of the process were difficult to navigate?
4. How effective were the modules in navigating your group through the process of creating career pathways?
5. What else would you like to share with me regarding the FORWARD program?

If additional information is needed on how to conduct a focus group, please visit the Community Tool Box, Chapter 3¹, where it discusses how to conduct focus groups.

Interviews with employers

Employers will be affected by the work undertaken by the FORWARD program. It is important to gather their feedback on how the program impacted them. The recommended format is to interview key employers touched by the program. Below are a few sample questions that could be used:

1. What new possibilities for training and/or career growth were explored for your employees?
2. How did the workforce development effort affect your business?
3. What new possibilities were discovered to support your business?
4. What do you plan to do differently as a result of the workforce development efforts?

Interviews or focus groups with job seekers

Throughout the process, there should be touchpoints with the job seekers in the county/region. The initial touchpoint occurs when identifying their process for finding information about job opportunities/trainings in the area as well as challenges; this could help you understand the current situation. Ideally interviews or focus groups with job seekers would happen after the creation of career maps within your community. This may or may not happen in all communities. If it does happen, the questions below can guide the information gathering process.

Once the career pathway has been developed, go back to job seekers and identify the following through an interview/focus group process:

1. Does the career pathway make sense?
2. Is it helpful?
3. How would they use this career pathway?
4. What changes (if any) need to be made to the career pathway?
5. Who would they share this career map with in the community?
6. Where should these career pathways be located throughout the community? How should they be accessed?

¹ <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main>

The goal of mapping career pathways is to streamline the process and understanding of how workers can advance further within their career. It is also to help individuals “see” the possible progression within an industry, understand what steps are needed to advance, and where the resources can be found to propel them forward.

A secondary goal of the career pathway development is to develop stronger coordination between private and public partners, assist employers, and help job seekers find meaningful employment. The work undertaken with this effort should extend to other industries in the county or region. Of course, some thought should be given to the sustainability of the work as local economies will continue to evolve with the changing technologies and markets.

Third Dimension: Identifying Outcomes via Ripple Effect Mapping

Workforce development is a complex topic and tackling it via mapping career pathways is only one piece of the overall puzzle. What makes it unique is that the local area (county/region) can manage the development of career pathways by leveraging partners in the region to communicate job opportunities for their residents. For many communities, this is likely a new endeavor with many moving parts. Therefore, the use of ripple effect mapping (REM) evaluation is likely a good fit to identify the outcomes generated from this work.

REM has been used by Extension professionals for several years to document outcomes. It is a facilitated activity that can be done either in-person or virtually. A guide for conducting ripple mapping for this purpose is listed in the Educator Resources section. Additional resources on ripple mapping can be found from Washington State University Extension and the University of Minnesota Extension. Both entities have resources that be viewed pub field guides and other resources from past webinars.

Invitations to participate in the REM exercise should be extended to the workforce development partnership team, employers, job seekers and any other stakeholders involved in the program. Plan on this exercise taking up to two hours to complete. The ripple effect mapping exercise is designed to draw out medium and long-term outcomes from the FORWARD program. Therefore, it is recommended that the REM be conducted 12-18 months after the program began in the county.

Educator Resources

FORWARD program indicators

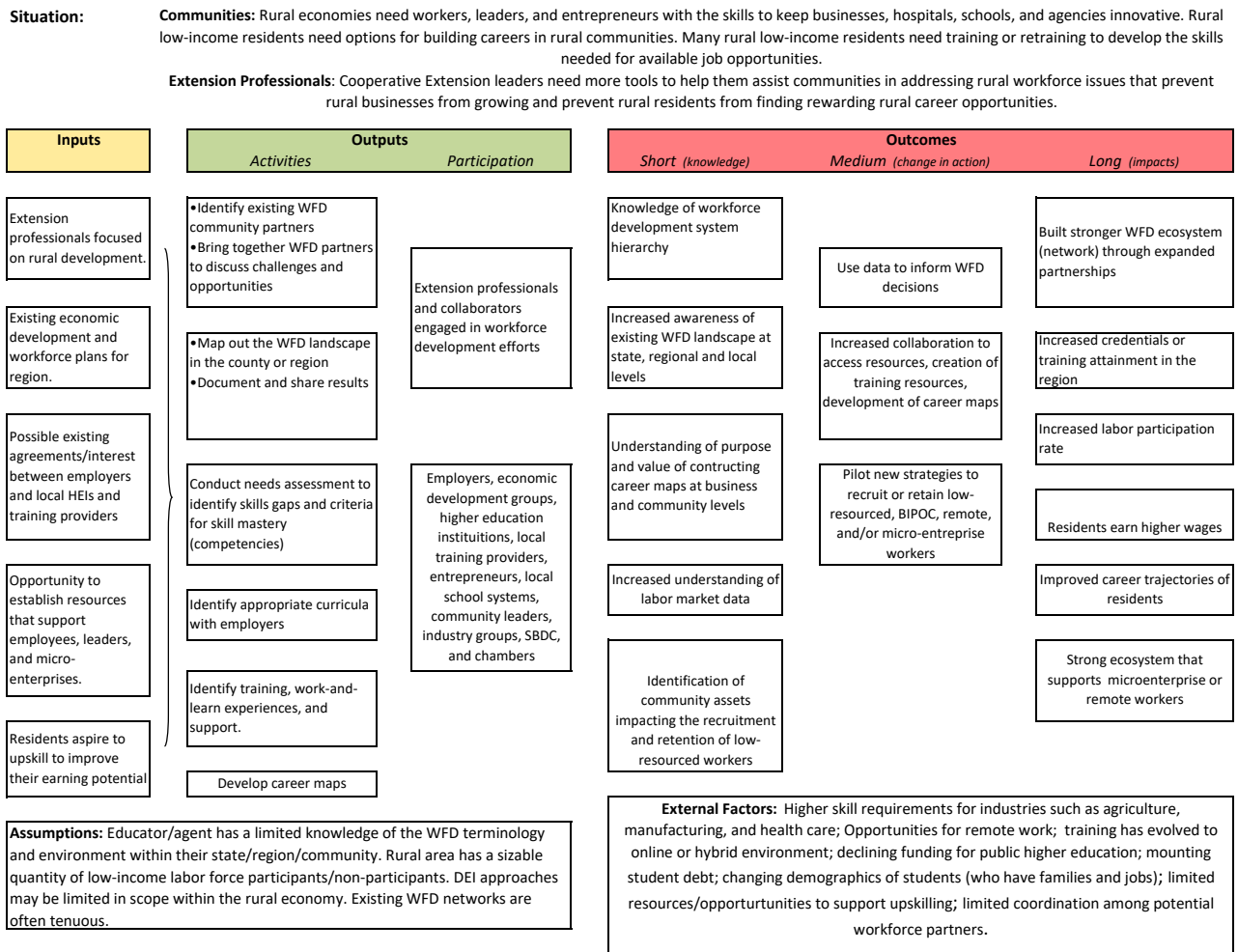
It is critical to document the impact of your work with the FORWARD program that can be communicated to your superiors and stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels. The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) has a set of indicators that have been similarly adopted by the Southern Regional Center for Rural Development (SRCRD). These indicators are reported at the national level to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and are good starting points in addition to your state’s reporting indicators. Below are recommended indicators to capture:

1. Educational contacts (number of participants involved in FORWARD)
2. Number of racial minority contacts (or other similar demographic information)
3. Number of community or organizational plans developed (i.e., new strategies, career maps, strategic plans, etc.)
4. Number of community and organizational strategies, policies, and plans adopted or implemented
5. Business indicators (number of jobs created or retained)
6. Dollar value of:
 - a. efficiencies and savings (this could be included in the ripple mapping exercise — allow attendees to determine value)
 - b. grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities (related to FORWARD efforts)
 - c. resources leveraged by businesses

Logic model

Figure 1 below illustrates the Workforce Engagement logic model. Note the situation, assumptions and external factors. Throughout the program, the half-page assessments will collect most of the short-term outcomes. The medium-term outcomes are to be documented through the interviews. The long-term outcomes will emerge during the ripple effect mapping exercise 12-18 months after the initiation of the program. The full size logic model is also in the appendix.

Figure 1: Workforce Engagement Logic Model



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Ripple Effect Mapping

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) typically happens several months after starting the program to allow for the resulting actions to bubble up from the community discussion. This will vary with each community, but it is recommended to use this technique 12 to 18 months after the workforce effort has begun. The Extension professional leads the mapping exercise and can recruit community partners to help organize and connect the stakeholder input during the exercise. Ripple Effect Mapping is both an evaluation of past actions and a planning tool for future community direction.

All community stakeholders that were involved in the effort are invited to participate in the session. It is helpful to have a mix of participants who represent the steering committee, organizational partners (non-profit and for-profit), employers and job seekers so that as many impacts as possible can be recorded.

The detailed “how to” process listed below is a tangible, low tech example of how REM was implemented in a workforce development situation. After the face-to-face meeting, the map can be recreated in a variety of digital formats for a more permanent record. Another option could be to have this type of discussion virtually using online whiteboards like Jamboard or Miro. However, the virtual option sometimes loses some of the creativity that comes through personal group dynamics.

Materials list:

- Adequate wall space to hang paper
- Sticky Note flip chart paper: Ripple Map Size suggestion: 3' x 2' (3 pages across and 2 pages up and down with a ½ inch overlap so you don't write on the walls)
- Markers: **First Ripple Blue**; **Second Ripple Green**; **Third Ripple Purple**; **Red for Most Significant**; **Community Capitals Black**
- Blue painting tape or poster hanging tape (so you don't damage walls) for extra support on walls
- Clear packing tape (to tape poster pages together when the ripple map is completed)
- Sign-up sheet
- Consent forms and media release forms (as required by your state)
- Business cards

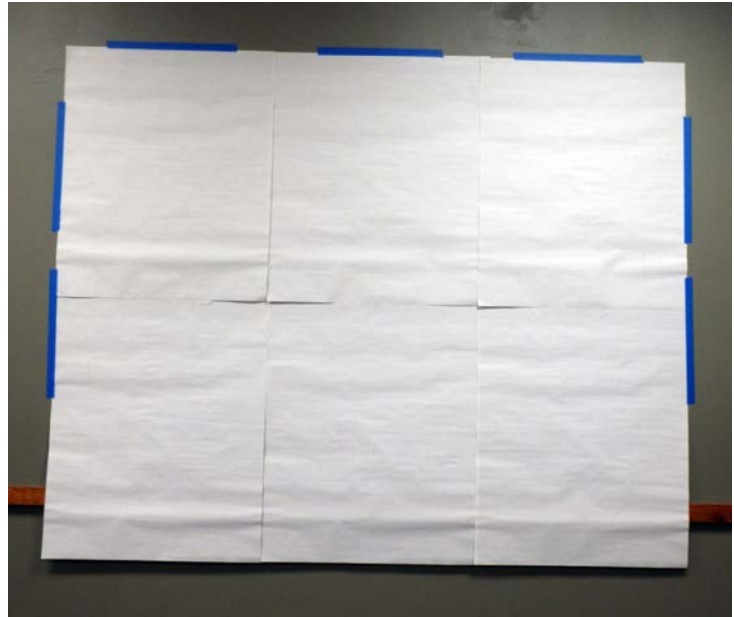


PHOTO 1. This is what your wall may look like once you tape your flip chart paper on the wall. There are 3 pages across and 2 pages up and down.

Ripple mapping instructions:

1. Welcome and introductions (pass around a sign-up sheet to collect contact information.)
2. If used by your state, ask for signed consent forms and media release forms. Explain purpose of forms.
3. Explain the “why” of Ripple Effect Mapping. The purpose of this activity is to look at how the work in the community has made a difference. We can use that information to think about what we can learn from our work together, how we can use that information going forward and how we can evaluate that work.
4. Confirm the topic and write in the center of the map (using a black marker): Workforce

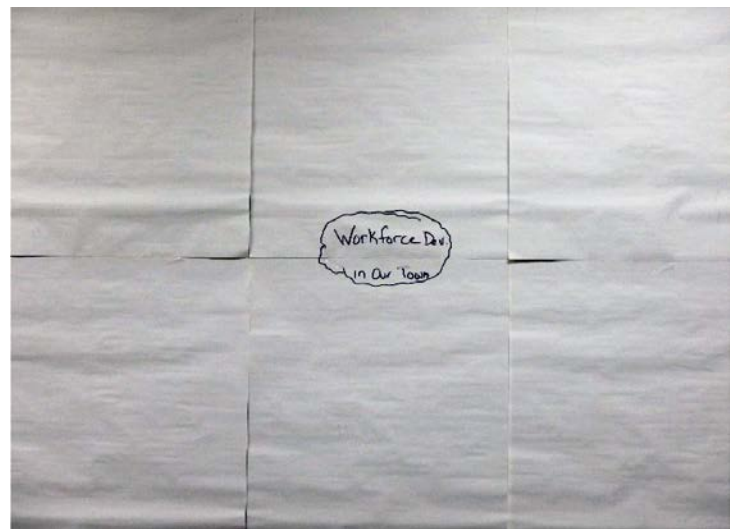


PHOTO 2. The community name and name of the program are in the center of the map.

Development/Community Name. Explain that the group should reflect on all their community accomplishments during effort and any that have happened since.

5. Begin by asking people to share, in pairs, for about 5 minutes how they feel their work has made a difference in the community. Remind them to consider their work in the community during the formal workforce development process.
6. Write the each of the following capitals (using a **black marker**) around the outside of the map. Share a brief description of each capital² as follows:
 - a. Start with natural capital (N) because it frames what is possible in a place. Natural capital includes natural resources assets as well as those in our environment. For communities interested in tourism or those focused on agriculture, natural capital is very important.
 - b. We often think of cultural capital (C) in terms of language, dress, traditions, music, etc. but cultural capital also includes our everyday ways of thinking and doing. Some communities might say for example, "A great asset here is our work ethic." That is an example of cultural capital.
 - c. Human capital (H) refers to our health, knowledge, skills, and understanding. It also includes self-efficacy or our belief we can make things happen.
 - d. When we talk about social capital (S), we are focusing on connections and relationships. We want to look at the networks people are involved in including those where people know each other well and bond together as well as those that are based on weak ties but link us to resources and information. Social capital exists where there are norms of reciprocity and trust.
 - e. Political capital (P) is often thought of in terms of policy, laws and running for office. Political capital includes the incentives or disincentives that link to certain types of behavior, but it also is about whose voices are heard and respected.
 - f. Financial capital (F) is most often a focus of community development efforts. It includes not only loans and investments but also gifts and philanthropy. Investments in financial capital lead to higher profits, more jobs and businesses.
 - g. Built capital (B) capital refers to our tangible infrastructure such as the roads we drive on, the towers that support our cell phone service and Internet access, and water treatment plants.
7. Explain the three levels of ripple process and the purpose of this tool is to better understand the impact of the workforce development program on the community. Think about it as a pebble tossed into a pond. Ripples in the pond keep extending outward, influencing a much greater area of the pond than just where the pebble landed. That is what happens when we take action in the community; the effects often go way beyond the action.

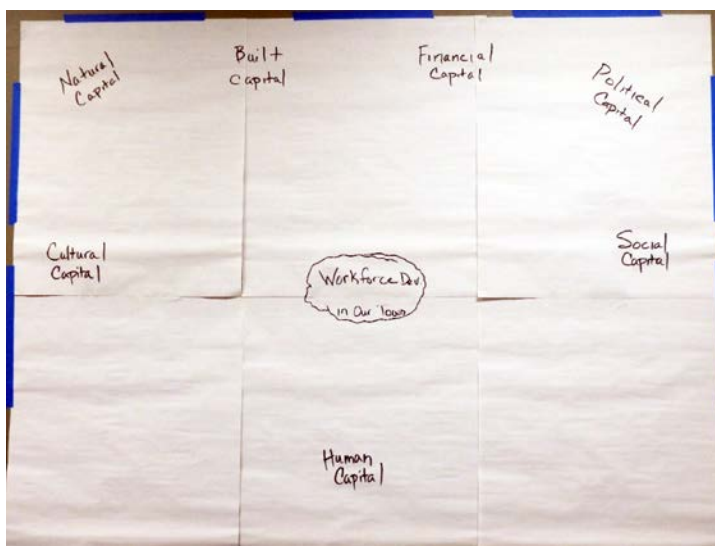


PHOTO 3. Community Capitals are written around the outside edge of the map.

² An excellent resource explaining the Community Capitals can be found at: [Community-Capitals-Beaulieu.pdf](https://cdextlibrary.org/Community-Capitals-Beaulieu.pdf) (cdextlibrary.org).

- Begin mapping the **first ripple** with the question — **What happened a result of the workforce development program?** Were there actions or efforts in the community that came about or were linked to the program that surprised you?

Use a **blue marker** to put each item near the center of the map. You may choose to put each item near the capital it best represents or you may even put the capital's initial after the item, as shown in Photo 4. You can also use the capitals as a discussion point for activities that may represent more than one capital. You can also probe for more ideas by asking about changes in the capitals not yet mentioned. As you go through the ripple map process, let the participants know that you can add any additional items for each ripple that they may think of later.

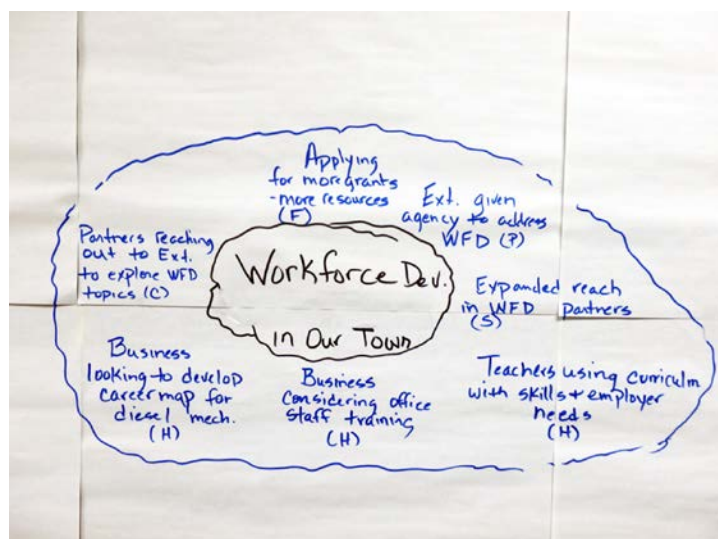


PHOTO 4. The first ripple of the map has been added to answer the question, “what happened a result of the workforce development program?”

- Begin mapping the **second ripple**, using a **green marker**, by focusing on items in the first ripple and using questions like these: **How did these actions benefit the community? How are people doing things differently?** Write the answers to these questions near the item on the first ripple to which it is connected. It is beneficial to draw an arrow from the item in the first ripple to the item in the second ripple to which it is connected. Sometimes the answer to the second ripple question will relate back to more than one activity in the first ripple so drawing arrows can get messy, but that is ok. No one said a Ripple Effect Map needed to be neat. In this example, we didn't use arrows because we thought it might end up making it hard to read in the photos.

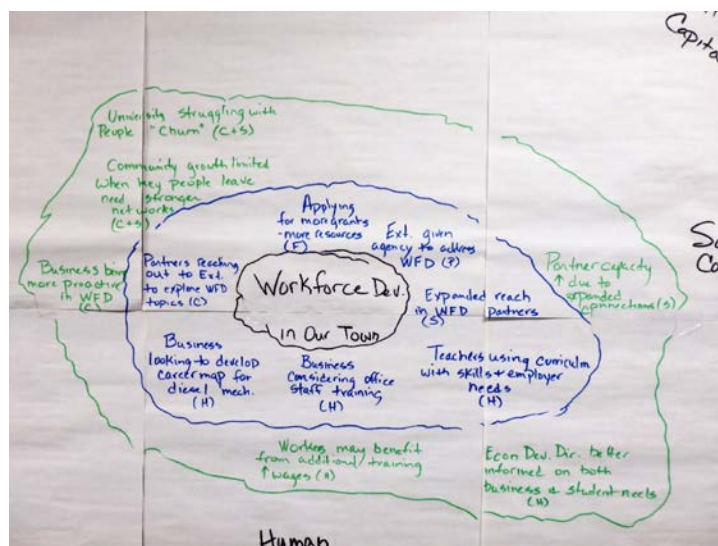


PHOTO 5. The second ripple of the map has been added to answer questions such as: How did these actions benefit the community? How are people doing things differently?

Here are some examples of prompting questions:

- o New opportunities?
- o Changes in attitudes or behavior?
- o New connections with people or organizations?
- o New resources?
- o More resources to strengthen businesses, attract newcomers, opportunities for residents?
- o Changes in leadership?
- o Changes to enhance natural assets or parks?
- o New events or changes to events?

10. Begin mapping the **third ripple**, using a **purple marker** by asking the question, **what changes are you seeing in your community's systems, institutions, and organizations?** (Are everyday ways of thinking and doing changing? How?) Again, you may wish to use an arrow to link items in the second ripple to those in the third ripple.

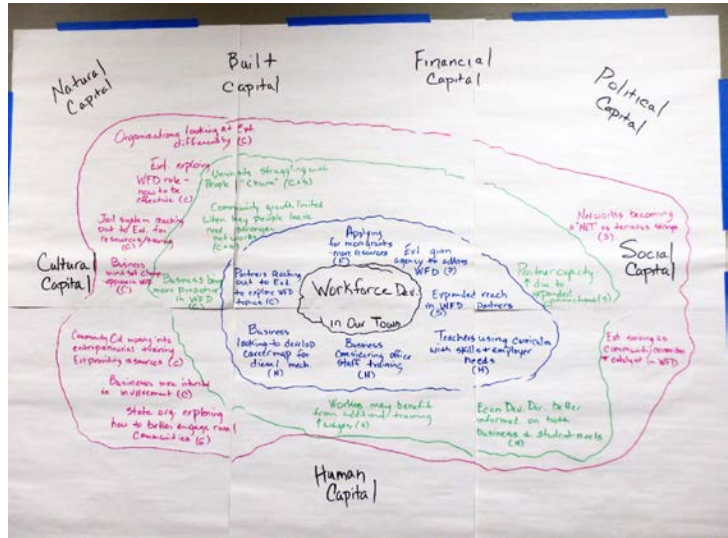


PHOTO 6. The third ripple of the map has been added to answer the question: “what changes are you seeing you seeing in your community's systems, institutions and organizations?”

11. Ask, “What do you think the most significant change is on the map? Why?” Use a **red marker** to star the item(s). Photo 7 provides a broad sketch of the process using colors and the asterisks.

12. Initiate a brief discussion for how the map can help with evaluation. Looking at the map and thinking about the impact of your work, what questions about your work would you like to have answers to?

13. Initiate a brief discussion on how this reflection process can provide insights into next steps. “What are the implications of what we learned about our impact from the mapping that will be helpful in the next round of our work?”



PHOTO 7. A red asterisk can be added in several ways. It might be linked to a specific input during the process, or it might become more of a summary statement related to one of the capitals. In this example the group wanted to summarize what they were seeing in each capital, so these summary statements were * and written in red for added emphasis.

This is an appropriate time to note the sometimes the outcomes that are viewed as the most important are often unintended. When the group started the workforce development program, they may not have anticipated the added benefit of connecting resources and developing workforce networks or the possible conversations about future workforce training centers.

14. Final Reflections (record on flip chart paper):
What are your next steps? Which action teams will continue? Will new action teams be formed? Who will continue to lead this effort forward now that you have this momentum? Who do you wish was involved in the project to better expand the impact? Who will contact them and invite them to become involved? (Encourage specific answers to these questions.) Leave the final reflections with the group.

Remind the group that, as an Extension professional, your role will probably shift at this time. Depending on the situation, share how you see your role evolving so that the participants are confident they can continue moving the community forward. Let them know that you and other members of the Extension staff are still available for assistance and to help answer questions or locate resources.



Photo 8. Don't forget the Next Steps. It will keep the effort moving forward.

15. Thank everyone for participating. Have business cards available for those who may want to contact you later.

Acknowledgement

This document was adapted by Cheryl Burkhardt-Kriesel, Extension Specialist, Nebraska Extension Rural Prosperity Nebraska, with permission, from a worksheet developed by Peggy Schlechter, Field Specialist, South Dakota State University Extension Community Vitality for the *Marketing Hometown America* program.

For additional information on the original document, Schlechter can be contacted at peggy.schlechter@sdstate.edu; for this adapted version, Burkhardt-Kriesel can be contacted at cburkhartkriesel1@unl.edu.

Appendix A: Immediate Assessment Documents

Program: Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD)

Module/Session: Developing Key Partnerships/Workforce Development 101

Location: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to gather your input on the FORWARD program. Please do not write your name on this survey. You must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Your participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous.

1. As a result of this Extension program: (check one response per row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned something that I didn't know before.					
I learned some helpful information.					
I better understand the workforce development system.					
I increased my awareness of community workforce development partners and their areas of expertise.					
I better understand the local workforce development landscape through the eyes of a job seeker.					

2. After participating in this session, I plan to try something new in response to what I learned.

Circle one: Yes No Not Sure

3. How USEFUL did you find this Extension session?

Circle one: Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Extremely

Program: Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD)

Module/Session: Labor Market Information

Location: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to gather your input on the FORWARD program. Please do not write your name on this survey. You must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Your participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous.

1. As a result of this Extension program: (check one response per row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned something that I didn't know before.					
I learned some helpful information.					
I increased my knowledge about the area's labor supply and where to find this information.					
I better understand the labor demand and the resources to find this information.					
I have improved confidence in interpreting data to support community workforce initiatives.					

2. After participating in this session, I plan to try something new in response to what I learned.

Circle one: Yes No Not Sure

3. How USEFUL did you find this Extension session?

Circle one: Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Extremely

Program: Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD)

Module/Session: Recruiting Rural Learners

Location: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to gather your input on the FORWARD program. Please do not write your name on this survey. You must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Your participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous.

1. As a result of this Extension program: (check one response per row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned something that I didn't know before.					
I learned some helpful information.					
I increased my awareness of community strengths/ weaknesses impacting the recruitment and retention of job seekers.					
I better understand the challenges faced by BIPOC and ALICE populations.					
I have increased awareness of resources and approaches being used to improve recruitment and retention of job seekers.					

2. After participating in this session, I plan to try something new in response to what I learned.

Circle one: Yes No Not Sure

3. How USEFUL did you find this Extension session?

Circle one: Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Extremely

Program: Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD)

Module/Session: Mapping Career Pathways

Location: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to gather your input on the FORWARD program. Please do not write your name on this survey. You must be 18 years old to complete this survey. Your participation is voluntary and responses are anonymous.

1. As a result of this Extension program: (check one response per row)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned something that I didn't know before.					
I learned some helpful information.					
I increased my knowledge about career pathways and its purpose.					
I have improved awareness of how training/ education programs are aligned to meet career pathway needs.					
I have enhanced understanding of how to implement the developed career pathway in the community.					

2. After participating in this session, I plan to try something new in response to what I learned.

Circle one: Yes No Not Sure

3. How USEFUL did you find this Extension session?

Circle one: Not at all Slightly Moderately Very Extremely

Appendix B: Logic Model (full-size)

Situation: Rural economies need workers, leaders, and entrepreneurs with the skills to keep businesses, hospitals, schools, and agencies innovative. Rural low-income residents need options for building careers in rural communities. Many rural low-income residents need training or retraining to develop the skills needed for available job opportunities.

Extension Professionals: Cooperative Extension leaders need more tools to help them assist communities in addressing rural workforce issues that prevent rural businesses from growing and prevent rural residents from finding rewarding rural career opportunities.

