

SOUTH DAKOTA FACE THE FUTURE!



*November 16, 2010
A Youth Roundtable in
Northwest South Dakota*

Face the Future – South Dakota Youth Roundtable

Authored by-Christina Barsky

South Dakota Horizons

South Dakota Horizons offers rural communities a chance to take action in building a strong leadership base in order to address difficult issues such as poverty, economic decline, and youth outmigration. The program focuses on communities with populations under 5,000 and poverty over 10 percent. Horizons is designed for communities that are ready to commit to gathering citizens and working towards positive change. From waiting to leading, from talk to action, from poverty to prosperity, from a few to many, from despair to hope, from indifference to pride, Horizons is a change agent in rural America.

Four Bands Community Fund

Four Bands Community Fund was established in 2000 and has since grown to be the leading organization on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in the areas of small business training and lending, entrepreneurship education, and financial literacy. Understanding the importance of the next generation, Four Bands also provides services for youth—sowing the seeds to encourage private business ownership and financial literacy at an early age.

Northern Plains Initiative

The Northern Plains Initiative (NPI) is a connector, informer, and advocate for the Northern Plains region spanning North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. Focused on creating thriving rural communities through cultivating program and policy resources and providing technical assistance, NPI facilitates roundtable events and communication campaigns focused on identifying strategies and opportunities for translating vision to reality. NPI seeks to empower a collective voice of hope for the region by cultivating sustainable relationships across borders.

RDI (Rural Dynamics, Inc.)

RDI has been providing free financial consultations across Montana since 1968. While still providing credit counseling, debt management plans, and financial education services, the organization has expanded partnerships and programs to offer free tax preparation services; Individual Development Account (IDA), matched savings for school or homeownership, programs; policy advocacy work; Bridge to Benefits, an on-line and anonymous work support screening tool; and other strategies to help move families to financial security.

Rural Dynamics Incorporated (RDI), works to achieve a vision for our region. This vision was created in partnership with organizations and individuals across the Northern Plains region and reflects our values.

We envision a region where individuals and families have the capacity to make positive choices regarding their economic future. Communities have the infrastructure and resources to provide residents with opportunities to earn a livable wage. We envision legacy communities where generations of families can live and support each other. Our region will protect people from predatory financial practices and the consequences of catastrophic incidents, helping them keep more of their money and assets. Individuals and families will have the opportunity to grow their assets providing a resource for themselves, their family, and their community.

Executive Summary

We have collaborated on several roundtable conversations and one topic that has come up, without fail, at each and every event—young people. What do we do with them? How do we keep them? How do we get them to come back? What the *heck* is going on with young people and *where the heck* are they all going?! It has struck me for some time that among all the conversations that were taking place about what young people *should* and *could* be doing to stay in rural communities, and about the programs we *will* and *are* going to create for them rarely had one young person present.

The tide has shifted and we are honored to be a part of the change. *Face the Future* is representative of a change of ideology. If we are looking for the answer to questions about young people, we should ask them. It is with the utmost pride we have partnered with the South Dakota Horizons Project and Four Bands Community Fund to bring the first rural South Dakota youth roundtable to reality. In a true spirit of collaboration, this event proves that when the right questions are asked, powerful answers will be received.

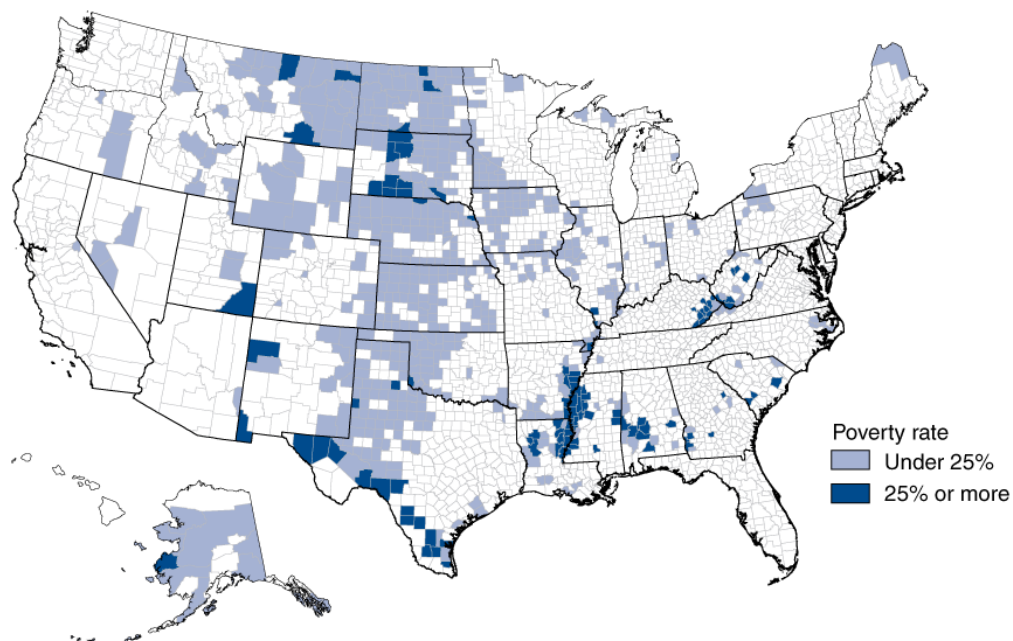
Christina Barsky – Program Director, Northern Plains Initiative

Why Face the Future

Rural America usually evokes images of farmland, small towns, miles of fence-line, two-lane roads, county fairs, and open spaces. Rarely does harkening this pastoral ideal stir up images regarding quality education, outmigration and population loss, job opportunities through entrepreneurship, broadband access, and acceptance. These are the issues facing rural America today and what young people must consider when deciding where to plant their roots. From 1988-2008 over one-third of nonmetropolitan counties lost more than ten-percent of their population through net outmigration. Though poverty and low education account for high net outmigration in *some* counties, most are relatively prosperous. While counties with low-poverty saw a six-percent population decrease from 1990-2000 in the form of their young adults leaving, these same counties only saw a one-percent growth from young families moving into their communities¹.

Figure 1

Nonmetro counties with net outmigration of 10 percent or more, 1988-2008, by poverty rate, 1999



Note: In this report, rural areas are defined using counties classified as nonmetropolitan by the Office of Management and budget (see glossary).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service based on Bureau of the Census migration estimates and, for poverty, 2000 Census data SF3 data files.

In a survey completed by communities participating in the South Dakota Horizons Project in the summer of 2010, at least seven localities in the northwest region of the state identified *involving youth in their community* as a top priority. Staff partners at the Cheyenne River Tribe youth services shared the same priority. Over the recent decades the region has lost population steadily and residents are concerned about maintaining and sustaining a population in their hometown communities.

Rural communities can and do prosper. Though isolated from the opportunities and resources readily available and prevalent in urban centers, rural prosperity can pin its success on the social capital that is thriving in tight-knit communities. It is the trust, reliance, bridges, and links that exist within a community that make the difference between a prosperous and struggling rural society. In a study of rural counties it was found that a prosperous county has 4.4 social establishments [such as a bowling alley, food and drinking establishment, and civic organization] compared to 3.2 establishments in other counties².

Understanding that outmigration is not an issue isolated to one county, one town, or one Reservation, the South Dakota Horizons Project, Four Bands Community Fund, and the Northern Plains Initiative hosted a roundtable, *Face the Future*. The focus was South Dakota youth living in the northwest area of the state (“west of the river” and north of Interstate 90). On November 16th 2010 a group of young people, school counselors, and interested parties from across South Dakota came together at the Legion Hall in Faith, South Dakota to discuss three core questions: *what do rural youth see as opportunities for themselves and their communities, what will enable or entice them to stay in their community or return in the future, and what are concrete projects or initiatives that will engage youth in their community?*

Why Young People

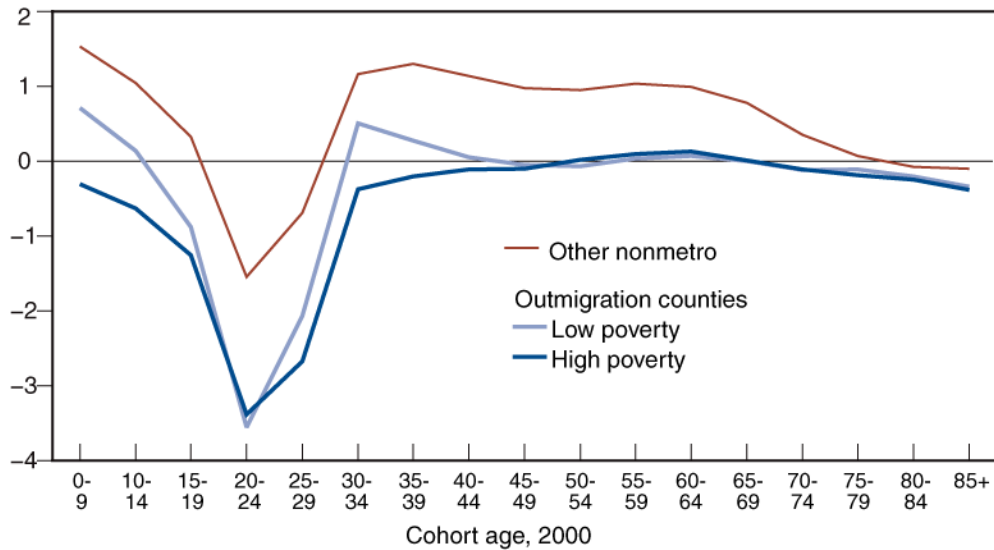
Organized through the South Dakota State University Extension Service, the Horizons Project understands that before Extension can design educational opportunities for youth to get involved in their communities, their voices need to be heard. As the Horizons Project grapples with issues of poverty and community development, bringing youth together in an interactive and informal format is important. Networking and discussing real issues facing youth and their communities is in lock-step with the fundamentals of the overall project “creating change through local engagement.”³

It is particularly important to consider young people when addressing issues of outmigration and return migration. Many small towns see an age-gap in their population, from the ages when young people graduate from high school, to when families may begin to have children or adults may have mid-career job changes that prompt their return to a hometown. Understanding age-related dynamics is “important when considering migration-related economic development policy, because different quality of life factors attract different age groups.”⁴



Figure 3
Age-cohort migration, 1990-2000, relative to nonmetro county population, 1990

Average percent county population change due to migration



Source: ERS, based on estimates generated by Johnson et al., 2005.

Why Northwestern South Dakota

South Dakota’s population has steadily been shifting from rural-to-urban over the last three decades. In 1980 sixty-five percent of South Dakota’s population was living in rural communities. In 2009, that number had dropped 11%, to just fifty-four percent of the population living in rural South Dakota. According to the National Center for Frontier Communities nearly nine million people live in frontier communities in the United States. While this is only about three percent of the total US population, frontier counties cover nearly 56% of all America’s land mass. In South Dakota, 41% of the population lives in frontier counties: the “West River,” north of Interstate 90 region of South Dakota, “northwestern” South Dakota, is comprised of 13 counties, all but two of which are considered frontier.⁵ Even with the addition of the non-frontier counties of Lawrence (population density in 2000 of 13 people per mi²) and Pennington (population density in 2000 of 33.7 people per mi²)⁶ the average population density of northwest South Dakota is 5.5 people per square mile, far below the national average for population density of nearly 80 people per square mile⁷.

The counties in the northwest region of South Dakota have experienced the issues inherent to rural America. If counties experience growth, it is slow growth; many communities suffer from outmigration and insufficient services. Seven of the thirteen counties that comprise northwest South Dakota experienced population decline over the most recent ten years⁸.

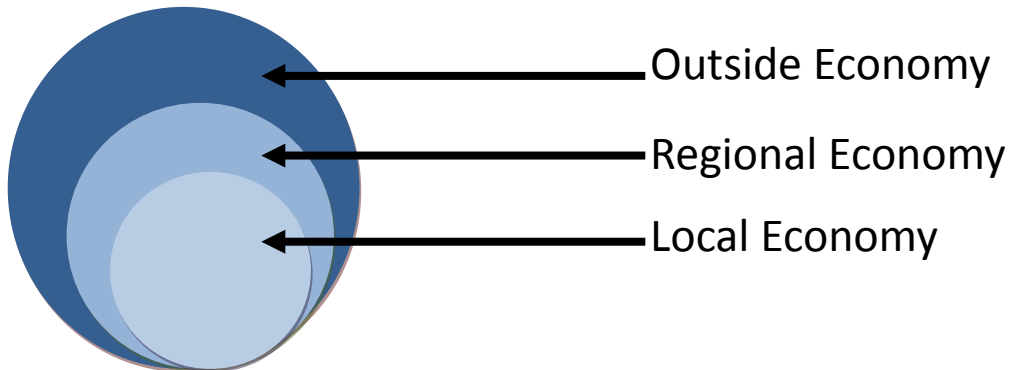
Face the Future – Process

Partners in the South Dakota Horizons Project and from Four Bands Community Fund helped spread the word about the opportunity for young people to speak together honestly about their futures and the future of their communities. Young people in grades 7-12 were invited to come together for a meal and conversation in the afternoon and into the early evening in a collaborative manner.

To commence, all participants were asked to sit at a large table covered with markers, notepads, snacks, butcher paper, crayons, and other tools to help them express their thoughts. The meaning of these tools was explained and creativity was encouraged. Each participant received an agenda and worksheets outlining the objectives of the event and the timeline. So that organizers and participants could have a clear understanding of what one another hoped to achieve. Understanding the framework in which the conversation was to commence, an adaption of First Nations *The Local Economy*⁹ exercise was used to help participants tune into what services they receive locally, regionally, and from outside economies.

Community Mapping

The Northern Plains Initiative facilitator explained the local economy of her hometown; utilizing pictures, images, and dialogue to explain the purpose of this exercise. She then explained connections between herself as an “outsider” to the northwest South Dakota region and the young people present at the table. Understanding the exercise, the participants broke into groups by geographic location. Each group was given a large flip-chart with circles identifying local (within the community), regional (traveling to a near-by community), and outside economies.



Throughout this exercise it was discovered that perhaps there needed to be a fourth circle for the Internet economy. Many participants felt that while there were a great deal of services that they did utilize within their local and regional economies, for ease of use, conservation of resources (fuel and time), choice, and variety, they turned to the Internet to do a great deal of their shopping.

The majority of the services that were available in each local economy revolved around agriculture, necessities such as fuel, food, and house and home wares; though it was pointed out that while a refrigerator can be purchased locally, prices are more reasonable regionally. Much of the commerce in local economies does not occur at traditional places of trade; rather, exchanges occur between sole proprietors and small business owners in ways uncommon in urban centers. For example, the quality of local meat was identified as a quality unrivaled in many places in the nation. Instead of shopping in a regional big-box chain for produce and meat, many northwest South Dakotans raise their own foodstuffs, utilize their local farmers markets or farm stands, and are able to purchase whole cattle or other locally raised meat; supporting local stock-growers and feeling a closer connection to their community.

It was discussed that while there are many services that are lacking in local northwest South Dakota economies, each community is different. Some are located close to Rapid City, a trade center and major population center in the state. The conclusion was that the population has steadily declined in rural South Dakota and so have the opportunities for young people to interact. The many, once-thriving, community resources available for young people to feel connected and included in their hometowns have also declined.

Focused Discussion

Having engaged in a conversation about what comprises each local community landscape the conversation turned to what the participants saw as positives, hindrances, and possibilities for their communities. Understanding that asking a young person, *what will keep you here* is a question that places limits on opportunities for the broader global community. Instead, the conversation was focused around what the participants would like to see in a community where they could see themselves returning after college, raising a family, or staying to take over a business.

Already having established trust with the young participants, open and easy conversation about acceptance, dreams, difficulties, and life in rural America unfolded. Participants ranged in age from rising high school

seniors to sixth and seventh grade students. Though a large age range existed, the message was universal— young people feel a lack of inclusion from the community, but have a deep passion for where they are from.

One participant, raised in a ranching family, expressed his dislike for all-things-urban, and his devotion to his family land. From his young age, his responsibilities were apparent and his deep desire to retain that identity steadfast. Another participant, closer to graduating high school, expressed his passion for music and sound engineering. When asked if he wanted to return to his hometown after college he said “yes.” However, opportunities for musicians in small rural communities are limited.

This entrepreneurial spirit, the desire to own businesses from farming to photography, is alive and well in rural America and was keenly expressed by the participants in the *Face the Future* roundtable. Recognizing that by starting their own businesses or maintaining an existing enterprise might be their only chance to return to their rural communities, participants had a sense of the unique spirit that comes from and upbringing in an isolated place.

When discussing *what will enable or entice you to stay in your community or return in the future?* and when asked *do you feel like you have a voice in your community?* participants discussed how they feel disenfranchised. When asked what they believed the causes for this were, many participants expressed concern over drug and alcohol abuse by young people in their towns. In fact, according to the *2005-2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* just over 10% of young people 12-17 and 16.4% of people 18-25 reported past month illicit drug use. In the same study, a shocking 52% of young people 18-25 reported past month binge alcohol use (five or more drinks on the same occasion) in South Dakota. South Dakota continues to remain among the Western states with the highest reported uses of methamphetamine, ranking at the top nationally in all age groups for use¹⁰. Participants were not naive to the fact that substance abuse is prevalent in their communities. In fact, the average reported binge drinking statistics for young people 18-25 is 32%¹¹ an identifier that substance abuse amongst the youth of rural South Dakota is a prevalent issue.

To break down these barriers and understand *how* young people can feel empowered within their communities. The conversation turned to what our participants saw as opportunities within their communities and what concrete projects could be undertaken to create a more prosperous future.

Action Groups

In order to successfully engage participants in meaningful discussion addressing an issue in their community, it was important that the group divide based on interest. Since the group was representative of two communities, Kadoka and Faith, two groups formed to address projects specific to each town. Each group was facilitated by a Northern Plains Initiative liaison and taken through a project planning process that helped participants identify a key initiative or project that was important for community vibrancy and to address the concerns and desires raised in the prior group discussion. Within the planning discussion each group addressed:

- Why is this issue important to you?
- What is the action plan?
- Who can join in this effort?
- When will this all happen (create a timeline!)?
- How will your community look afterwards?



Faith

Faith, South Dakota has a population of 421 according to the 2010 United States Census, and experienced a 13.9% population decrease over the last decade. Participants from Faith expressed interest in three priorities: a humane society, a youth center for the arts, and establishing a YMCA.

When asked *why are these issues important*, each community action item had a different response. The humane society participants indicated that there are a great deal of stray animals in the community that do not receive care and that they would like to create a safe place for them. Importantly, participants also saw the humane society as a career path, expressing interest in becoming veterinarians and nonprofit directors throughout the discussion of this action item. With regards to the youth center for the arts, participants indicated that they desired a place to express themselves through arts and crafts, to learn about cameras and explore photography, to play music, to have community plays and learn the theatre arts, and learn more traditional handicrafts and arts such as knitting and quilt making. Throughout this discussion it was emphasized that rural communities do not emphasize the arts enough and they there is not an opportunity to have creative outlet. As discussion turned to the YMCA, participants explained a desire to have more recreational activities outside of the small team sports that may be available through school. It was important for them that young people have an opportunity to focus on health and education.



All of these wants focus on providing a community service. When asked *who should we engage* the Faith participants were able to identify a variety of partners: from classmates to their community Horizons Steering Committee, to local media, to 4H clubs, the participants cast their net of engagement broad and wide. Inclusion was not limited to those related in age but included the Senior Center, local nonprofits, family members, and even the suggestion to include a specific “grandma.” The young participants even identified locations to host each endeavor; from an old veterinary office for the humane society, to a museum for the youth center for the arts, to an old school for the YMCA.

When asked to define a timeline, participants realized that with such lofty goals as to establish three separate endeavors a timeline would be difficult. Focusing primarily on creating local support through media campaigns and fundraising, the Faith group discussed building momentum, establishing a board, creating a business plan, and fundraising in the first two years of their community endeavors.

When asked *how will your community look afterwards* young Faith participants responded, “It will look awesome! More people will want to come here—to visit, to live, to return.” With this ideal in mind, the group created a motto, *Have Faith in Us* to guide their project forward.

Kadoka

Kadoka, South Dakota has a population of just 654 and experienced a population drop of 7.4% over the past decade¹². While there were only two participants from Kadoka at the roundtable event, they were excited about planning for the future prosperity of their hometown. Preliminarily identifying a youth center as their project, and then recognizing the need for a space for all to enjoy regardless of age, the Kadoka participants decided to set their sights on establishing a community center.

When considering *why is this issue important to you*, the participants from Kadoka spoke frankly about the lack of activities available for young people in their community. The young people from Kadoka were in high school and spoke about frustrations surrounding activities for young adults; for example, where to go on a date, where to go with friends on a Saturday night, and the lack of enrichment activities. Both participants were athletes but expressed difficulty for those who may not be athletically inclined or have down time during

the off season. With these issues in mind, they settled on the idea of a community center as a project because it would bring both the youth and the elders of their community together, provide a safe space for people to be, provide an indoor sports area, and a place for tutoring to take place. It was important to this group that Kadoka pride be maintained and held centrally, they saw a community center as a logical way to establish a hub for community activity.

When asked *who can we engage in this effort*, participants from Kadoka started naming names. The two young men had ideas of who to contact and why. Beginning with the person they viewed to be the most well-off in town, along with the principal of the high school, to their teachers, peers, past Kadoka residents, and area cohorts—they recognized that *their* community center could be a *regional* community gathering place for other rural young people like them, who might not have a gathering place in their town. Upon further discussion the Kadoka group realized they could broaden their scope and include funders, the media, local, state, and national political figures, and famous South Dakotans in their ambition.

A go-getting group, the Kadoka youth established a five-year timeline for getting a community center established in their town. They ironed out everything in elaborate detail, from in which year the groundbreaking will take place (and whether or not a preexisting building will be used or if new construction will be – and on what site in the community) to how much money will be raised each year to a communications and media campaign throughout the process to identifying potential funders and more points of contact for the Kadoka participants.



Asked *how will your community look afterwards*, the participants expressed a town with an increased sense of pride and connection to one another. Understanding that a community center will give young people employment opportunities, that is, a place to work itself, and a sense of purpose, it was the hope of Kadoka participants that a community center will curb the substance abuse issues prevalent in their community and encourage interaction and engagement between the generations.

Take Aways

No matter the age group, locality, or ambitions, identifiable conclusions can be drawn from the conversations within each community group and the general participant discussion.

Young people are searching for empowerment and inclusion.

When considering what is necessary to entice young people into returning or remaining in rural communities, it is important that they feel a part of the community to begin with. Unless there is a sense of place, there is no hope of creating a program, an opportunity, or luring a past resident back later in life. As mentioned previously, the greatest strength that successful rural counties have is their social capital. Making sure that young people are included and valued as a part of that social capital will only weave a tighter social fabric.

Provide opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Young people recognize that there is a wide, broad world beyond their back doors. This fact is heightened in rural communities. With the Internet, telecommuting, and news and information readily available, there is no longer a lag in sending and receiving information. Young people in rural America recognize that as the Great Recession took a hold of major US cities, unemployment remained low in many rural counties because of the simple fact that there is limited employment to begin with. Providing opportunities and encouraging entrepreneurship through programs beginning at early ages in school is important to encouraging young adults to choose their own future. Establishing community

banking and lending funds, and reminding young people that it is not a failure to return home and start or take over a business are important elements to encourage entrepreneurship in rural communities.

Provide a seat at the table.

Too often the conversation about rural outmigration, the “brain drain,” and young people leaving rural communities happens without any young people present. It is imperative that young people are present, heard, and able to have a voice on these issues to provide solutions and action items to help create sustainable rural communities. There should be no conversation about what young people need without young people.

Next Steps

Based on the success of the *Face the Future* event in Faith, schools throughout South Dakota have contacted the South Dakota Horizons Project and requested facilitation of similar events on their premises. Replication is important to continuing the conversation and maintaining movement in community visioning, understanding the youth perspective, and establishing youth-directed projects within rural communities.

In order to keep in contact with participants, social media and various on-line tools are being utilized to continue information sharing. A Facebook page entitled *Face the Future* has been established where participants can share information and facilitators can post resources pertinent to youth, rural America, and their specific projects. A Google Group has also been set up with the intention for users to share documents and resources, with every user having administrator privileges—giving autonomy to the participants and allowing them control over their communications.

Finally, in the first part of 2011 word was received at the Northern Plains Initiative that preliminary work in Kadoka has begun to establish a community center, guided by the participants of the *Face the Future* roundtable.

Contacts

For more information on the Northern Plains Initiative please visit www.PlainsTalk.org or email NPI@RuralDynamics.org. Continue to follow our work by joining our conversation online: find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NorthernPlainsInitiative and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/NPInitiative

For more information on South Dakota Horizons Project visit <http://southdakota.communityblogs.us/> or contact Kari Fruechte at Kari.Fruechte@sdstate.edu.

For more information on Four Bands Community Fund visit www.fourbands.org or email Tanya Fiddler at tfiddler@fourbands.org or Donita Fischer at donita@fourbands.org.

Endnotes

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Rural Dynamics Inc.
2022 Central Avenue • Great Falls, MT • 59401
www.RuralDynamics.org • www.PlainsTalk.org
1.877.275.2227 • 1.406.761.8721