

Stories of Community Resilience

Highlighting success through Ripple Effects Mapping

Holli Arp, Becca Leys, Jennifer Aranda, and Ellen Wolter
Scott Chazdon (Consultant), Becky Adams (Blandin Foundation)



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

Presenting Issue

Rural communities are facing population shifts, evolving economies, and new local needs. Despite these changes, many communities display remarkable resilience but they often lack the capacity to capture and reflect on their successes. Across Minnesota, residents are coming together to strengthen education, culture, housing, economy, and leadership. Understanding what drives community resilience is critical for communities to build on their successes and for organizations like Extension to better support them as they continue to navigate change.

Extension's Programmatic Response

To better understand the elements and impacts of successful community initiatives, the Blandin Foundation and University of Minnesota Extension invited 10 rural communities across Minnesota to participate in a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) process.

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is a qualitative evaluation method that uses asset-based interviews to visually map key themes of a project's implementation, challenges, and outcomes in collaboration with communities.



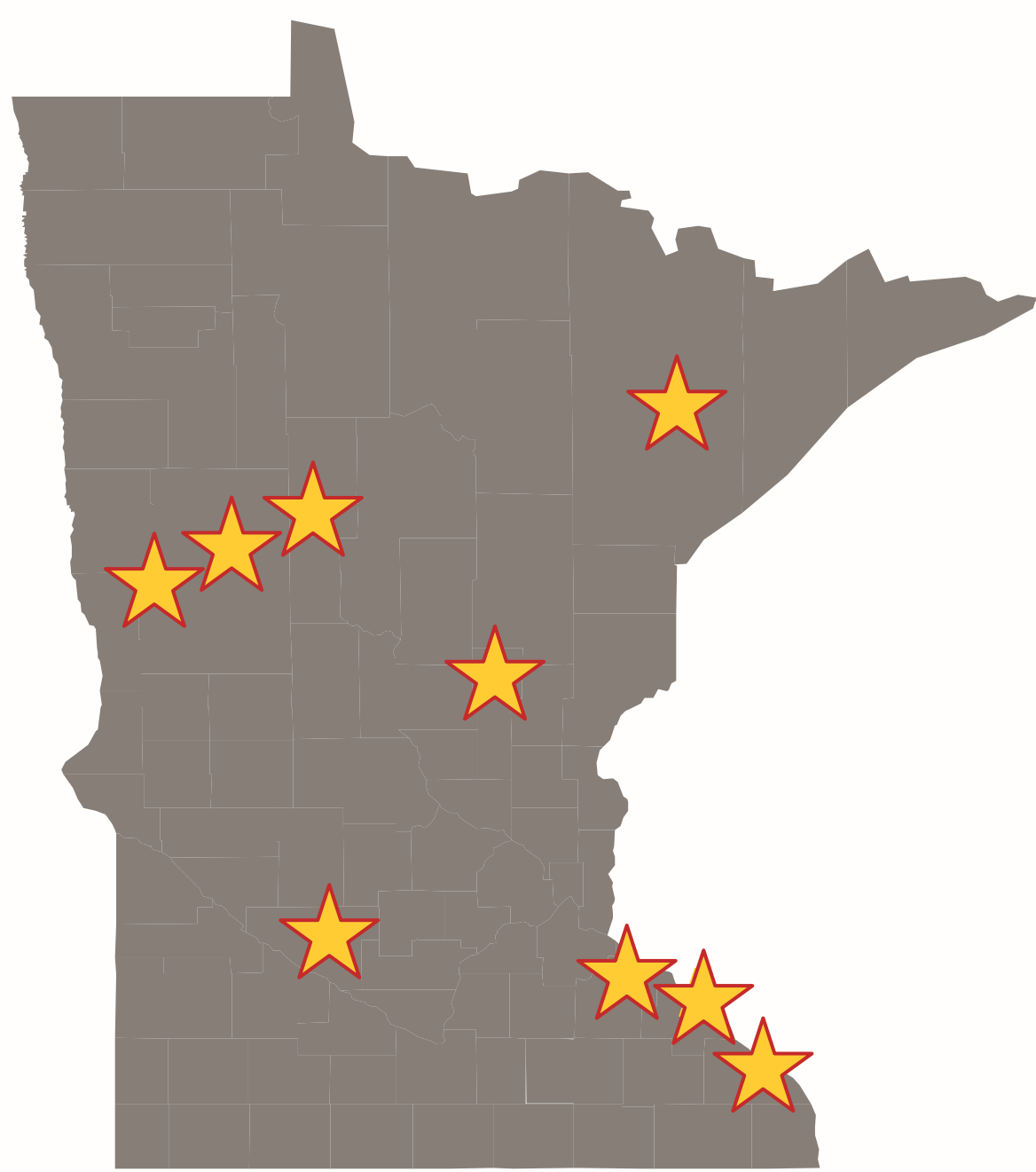
Project phases:

- Selected 10 communities, of which 9 moved forward with the process, through an open application
- Collaborated with a local steering committee to plan and a host REM sessions for each community
- Created ripple maps and reports for each community
- Analyzed REM findings to identify overarching elements of community resilience
- Met with all collaborators to vet the core elements

Target Audience

Primary: Rural community leaders who have been a part of a successful community initiative in communities with a population under 35,000.

Secondary: Organizations that demonstrate leadership across a variety of broad-based community issues.



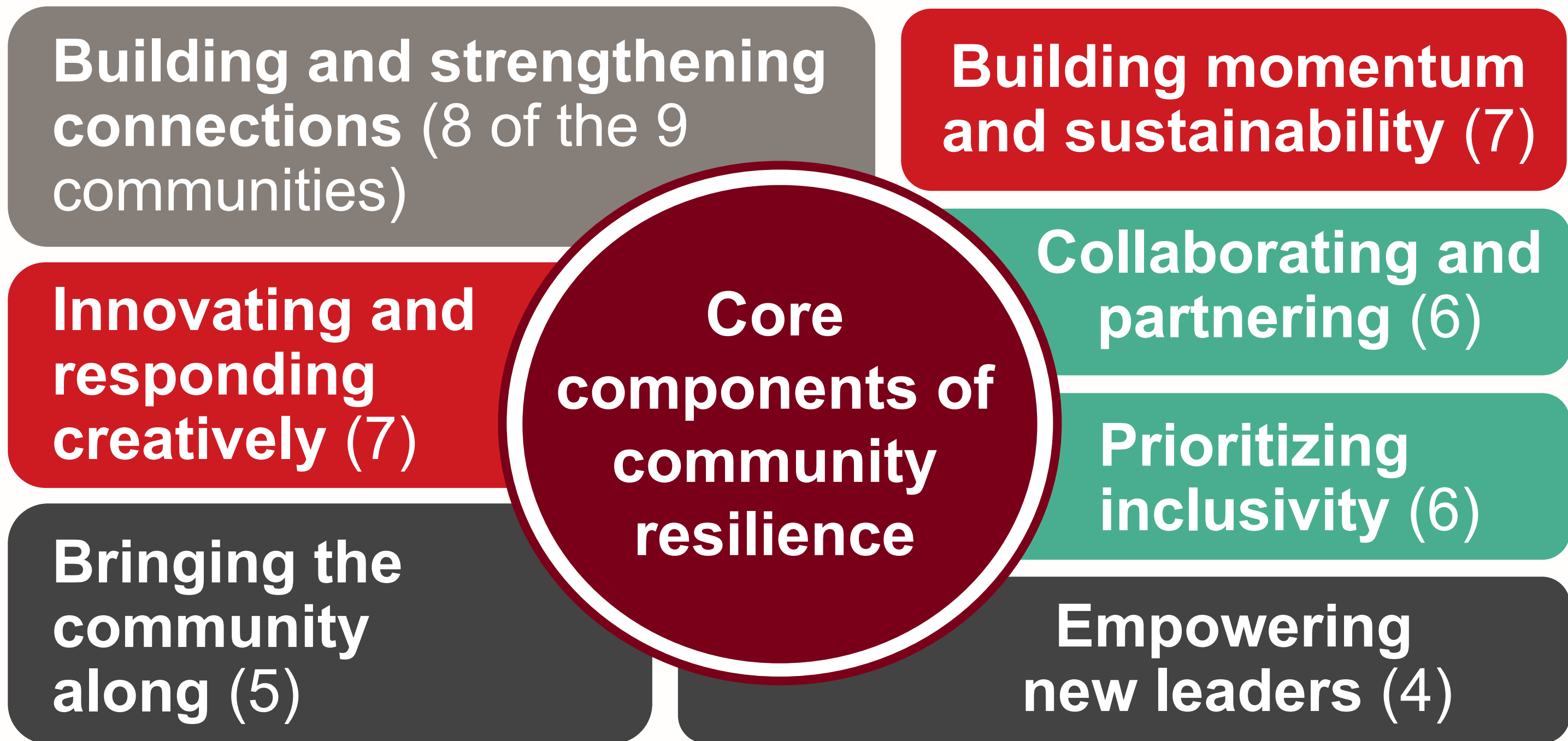
Participating communities

Why Extension?

- ✓ The University of Minnesota Extension has been a leader in using Ripple Effects Mapping as a community evaluation tool.
- ✓ Extension and its public-serving partners have a track record in rural communities to inform the identification of community resilience elements and to share insights across the state.

Behavior or Action Outcomes

Analysis of the communities participating in the REM process revealed eight common themes that reflect core elements of community resilience.



Value for communities

In a session with 6 of the 9 communities represented, local leaders emphasized the value of capturing and reflecting on the long-term impacts of their work.

Participating in the REM process led to:

- Reinforced sense of pride, purpose, and momentum
- Clearer understanding of project impacts
- Opportunities to expand and build new partnerships
- More compelling grant applications
- Strengthened support networks and peer learning

Broader Impacts

The core elements of community resilience identified here will inform future research and program development by Extension. Sharing examples from the REM analysis has also inspired and connected rural communities, offering hope and ideas for what's possible in similar contexts.

References

Chazdon, Scott; Emery, Mary; Hansen, Debra; Higgins, Lorie; Sero, Rebecca. (2017). A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping. Retrieved from the University Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/190639>.