



**MAXIMIZE
NWMO**

Dream big and grow together.

Communities of Excellence 2026 Journey to Community Excellence Application for Level 3 Assessment

July 15, 2021

WELCOME TO OUR COLLABORATION STORY



P COMMUNITY PROFILE

The introduction to Our Maximize NWMO CollaborACTION Story is where we answer the questions, “Who, what, when, and where is your community? What is important about it and why? What does it look, feel, sound, and taste like? If your efforts are a journey, where do the many voices want to go and why?”

P.1 Community Description: What are your community’s key characteristics?

P.1.a. Community Environment

P.1.a. (1) Community Definition and Identity

Geography and Population.

Northwest Missouri [NWMO] is part of America’s heartland crossroads bounded by the Missouri River, Iowa, Kansas, and Greater Kansas City. This 18-county region is the service area of The Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri [CFNWMO] and its regional vitality initiative, Maximize NWMO. The region is also served by three U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration [EDA] Regional Planning Commissions and many other local, regional, state, and national entities. NWMO residents reside in four categories of population (See Figure P.1.a. (1) – A): Rural Nonmetro, Noncore; Rural Metro; Rural Nonmetro, Micropolitan; and, Urban Metro. All, but one county identifies as rural in population and culture.

This region covers a lot of geography with a relatively sparse population. The 18 counties support just over 250,000 people across a total of 9,307 square miles (U.S. Census, 2020). The population is down by almost 5% over the last decade due to net domestic out-migration and negligible natural increase. Buchanan County (St. Joseph), the only metro area, lost nearly 10% and Nodaway County (Maryville), the only micropolitan, lost 7% of its population. Andrew County was the only county to gain slightly in this period while DeKalb (-15%), Holt (-14%), Sullivan (-10%), and Atchison (-10%) counties lost substantial population.

OUR REGION Northwest Missouri’s 18 Counties

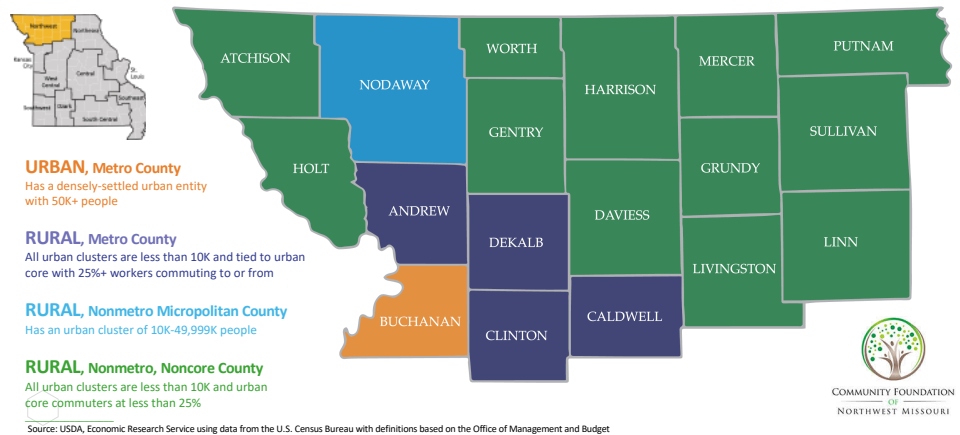
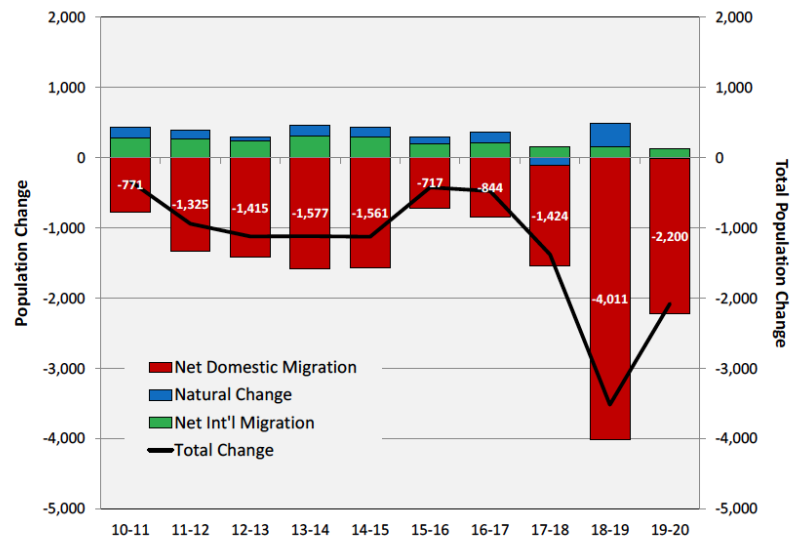


Figure P.1.a. (1) - A

Components of Population Change in the Northwest Missouri Region (2010-2020)



Figures P.1.a. (1) - B

Urgent Challenge and Opportunity. This region, like much of Rural America, is challenged to expand and create new economic endeavors that can sustain, revitalize, and grow the region's numerous communities. The emptying rural workforce pipeline and the resulting fear and attitudes of resistance to change continue to threaten and undermine the future. Smaller and larger trade center communities are at risk of survival. Further addressing the reasons why people leave, and finding ways to attract former residents to return is recommended by experts consulted and residents surveyed.

Yet, while challenged with outmigration, the region is proving in this new decade to also be a great area for social gathering in some of the revitalized downtowns as well as the beautiful state parks, conservation areas, campgrounds, hiking trails, and hunting and fishing locations. The region is connected to larger markets thanks to a robust transportation system of two Interstate freeways, several multistate highways, railways, small airports, and our proximity to the Kansas City International Airport, in Kansas City, MO, Omaha, NE's many resources to the northwest, and Des Moines, IA's industry to the north. Our cost of living is lower than many parts of the country, which makes it attractive to those working remotely and looking for smaller satellite business locations. And, as high-speed broadband availability in more areas grows, the region is well-positioned to finally turn around the relentless crisis of chronic and severe depopulation, and the corresponding erosion of community and economic vitality. Whether the region's leaders will work together across sectors to leverage all of these advantages is what Maximize NWMO is aimed at addressing.

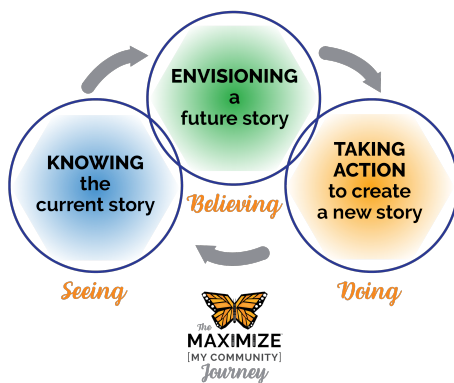


Figure P.1.a.(3)

Regional Community Identity. NWMO's regional identity is historically both independent and collaborative; perhaps because of our deep agrarian roots, political and religious diversity and independence, and family-focused values. Like many rural areas, settlers and modern-day residents are naturally inclined to think entrepreneurially out of necessity. When they need something, people either make do or make something better when faced with the challenges of living more than a few minutes away from a wide variety of retail and service industry options. Famous innovators, including the masterminds of the Pony Express, Walt Disney, Dale Carnegie, and J. C. Penney, modeled their companies from NWMO unique spirit and values. They all designed improvements to life because they saw needs to be filled balanced with a desire to hold onto aspects that were dear to them. J. C. Penney understood that people needed to be

met with quality and affordable retail goods where they lived in smaller towns and cities. Disney's iconic "Main Street" reflects the boyhood memory of his small hometown of Marceline, but more importantly, it reflects the positive virtues of safety, prosperity, kindness, industriousness, love, and belonging that many Americans indicated decades ago, and still indicate based on the 2020 Alumni & Resident Survey, wanting more of in their lives. Particularly, current and former residents with strong ties to the region who moved away for education, jobs, careers, marriage, and other reasons.

P.1.a. (2) Community Offerings (18-county Regional Community of Northwest Missouri)

The CFNWMO Transfer of Wealth Study conducted in 2012-2013 estimates the generational transfer between 2019 and 2029 will be \$19 Billion. If we can make a case for residents and businesses to retain at least 5% of this wealth in NWMO for investing in transformative community systems, leadership, aligned strategic priorities, operating and communications platforms, and decision support, as well as place-making amenities and quality of life improvements, then our core community offerings will advance and improve. If we fail to grasp these resources collectively, generational wealth will continue to leave as people leave, and the region's downward spiral will pick up noticeable speed apace with the fast-moving advancement of technology.

An asset-based approach to community development, Maximize NWMO is compiling a growing inventory of regional community offerings that enhance and relate to regional strategic priorities. Following, is a high-level summary.

Education: NWMO has 42 school systems. A company named “Niche,” which ranks school systems, gave all of our region’s schools scores between an “A- and a C”. This means our schools are on par with or better than most Missouri schools. We also have two universities, one two-year college, and six vocational schools that have been, or will be, engaged in our effort. Northwest Missouri State University is a three-time Missouri Quality Award Winner and a source of performance excellence experience with widespread influence throughout the region.

Quality of Life and Placemaking: As a whole, our quality of life is a point of pride (e.g., safety, relatively low crime rates, friendliness, civic engagement, and a collaborative spirit). Further, our region has abundant land, clean water, the Missouri river, and is strong in outdoor life and sports. As one of our local community participants wrote, “We have the best of country living in close proximity to the amenities of Kansas City.”

Healthcare: Two NWMO health systems are past Baldrige Award winners. Plus, we have a strong network of Federally Qualified Health Centers [FQHC]. Citizen/resident opinions and feedback themes identified in nine separate Community Health Needs Assessments [CHNA] in our region, including critical care access hospitals, are as follows: 1) Mental health (adult and youth), 2) Drugs/opioids/substance abuse, 3) Access to affordable care, 4) Obesity, and 5) Economic/living wage jobs/poverty.

Economics: Currently, agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and education drive the local economy. There is a strong network of small business and entrepreneurial enterprise start-up coaching and facilitation resources as well as some leadership development and networking programs across the region. However, research and analysis of the region concludes that the region needs thoughtful fact-based regional strategies to drive investment in the local economy. Some needs include accessible and affordable high-speed broadband to the end of the road (all rural areas in addition to the city limits of rural communities); attraction and enhancement of a wide range of workforce skills; and, upgrading local community and regional infrastructure. Other important issues are developing a more balanced economy with less overreliance on too few industries, enhancement of the ecosystem to support entrepreneurship and innovation, and development of more systems-thinkers and leaders throughout the region.

Overall, place-making and building a stronger and more positive sense of belonging has been identified by gap analysis research, rural community development research, and more than 2,500 alumni and residents of the region. Maximize NWMO’s Navigation Team (community excellence group) has learned that many of the typical activities of an inclusive and comprehensive community development leadership group are not possible without a strong backbone organization. Therefore, the team’s first strategic objective is to build and serve as the region’s neutral support through three strategic priorities and *offerings* that will eventually help improve the regional community’s offerings. Our current priorities are relevant to the Communities of Excellence Framework because they build the strategic and operational infrastructure required to select viable strategies and implement them. In their absence, nothing can change.

1. **Community Leadership Capacity- and Capability-Building** through learning programs and coaching around the unique and proven Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework™ for community collaboration efforts.
2. **Regional Shared Priorities and Knowledge Support**
 - Keep talent here and attract talent and innovation to the region to contribute to the building of a next-level entrepreneurial support system while uplifting and expanding current efforts.
 - Help ensure all addresses have access to high-speed broadband Internet.
3. **Communications and Regional Backbone Support of Maximize NWMO** for network cultivation, communication, and stakeholder engagement across counties, sectors, and other diverse community identifiers.

P.1.a. (3) Residents, other Customers and Stakeholders

Maximize NWMO values an inclusive and comprehensive regional stakeholder approach that helps people understand that regardless of what priority is uplifted in the center, all areas are impacted and/or influence outcomes. Many of the region’s leaders in multiple sectors, and especially in economic and community development, consider themselves to be better at collaborating than most regions. Our Navigation Team recognizes that there has indeed been a spirit of coming together over the past several decades with some accomplishments to show for the efforts. The expectations set in many of these gatherings by residents, customers, and stakeholders

have been reasonable and inspired transformative solutions to problems. However, our team also respectfully calls out, and has heard from many of the volunteers now involved, that while the region is great at gathering, conversing, and planning, following through on decisions is often lacking due to a void of facilitation, coordination, and communications support. This repeated disappointment has burned many veteran leaders out on regional visioning and projects and has fostered a deep-seeded distrust of anyone new claiming to help. Maximize NWMO has a challenging set of hurdles to overcome, and is starting to see some success by showing people that follow-through is not only possible, but can be guided in an interactive and logical manner to achieve results.

The CFNWMO began their regional vitality initiative by conducting three regional conversations, followed by three caucuses seeking consensus on the findings and focus areas in 2015-2016. The events included 180 citizens, residents and local leaders. Throughout 2020, more than 200 community leaders across the region engaged in Regional Community Discussions about how to be improve the vitality of this place that so many communities call home. In addition, we partnered with MU Exceed to conduct a gap analysis of existing regional strategic plans and research recommendations, as well as a grassroots online survey to discover what people like and dislike about the region that drives decisions on where to live. As we proceed with bringing in more partners and residents to work on envisioning possibilities, stakeholder requirements and expectations are being identified and determined through a set of pilot communities, additional regional community conversations and forums, Discovery Groups (expert focus groups), and CollaborACTION Teams made up of citizens throughout the region. Residents and other customers are exploring and understanding issues, determining if associated improvement projects should be pursued and what are the key considerations that would be important to the residents in moving forward, and are empowering each other to act in a more aligned manner.

P.1.a. (4) People and Organizational Resources

Maximize NWMO is seeking goal alignment and the harmonizing of plans, people, and organizations across all

sectors. We are empowering leaders and helping communities and the region maximize win-win opportunities by offering a comprehensive framework that includes the proven and promising practices of Communities of Excellence 2026 and other problem-solving and continuous learning approaches to community development. The collaboration guidance is designed to support the transformational process of growth from reactive to proactive, aligned, and integrated in vision and action. (Figure P.1.a.(4) – A)

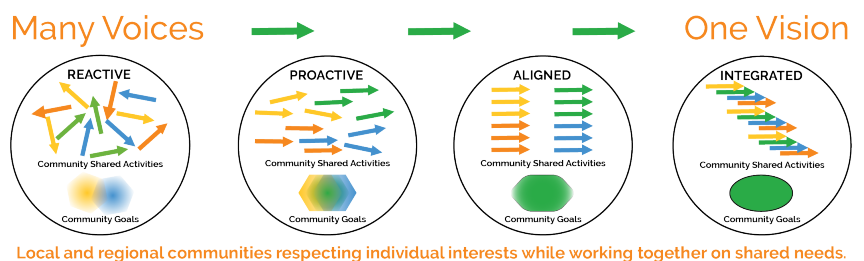


Figure P.1.a.(4) - A



Figure P.1.a.(4) - B

Many of the areas in Figure P.1.a.(4) – B are currently participating in Maximize NWMO’s events and teams in some way. The desired state and near future plan is to formally invite leaders throughout the region and across these sectors to join the community development efforts beyond working in their own sectors and local communities. The spirit of collaboration is alive in NWMO. The time has come to carry that spirit to the next level by building stronger relationships and communication across traditional boundary lines to dream big and grow together. (Refer to Category 5 for further detailed information.)

P.1.a. (5) Regulatory Environment

Regulatory issues are addressed as needed and in accordance with sound agile and design-thinking in decision making discussions. Each group from the Navigation Team (core leadership), Network Coordination and Support Team (day-to-day backbone operations) and Partner Council (advisory) within the Guiding Coalition to Discovery Groups (focus/research) and CollaborACTION Teams (task/work) within the Action Network of Maximize NWMO addresses the unique regulatory issues related to their discussions and work. For example, Broadband expansion has many layers of regulatory requirements; however, launching our online communication system www.maximizenwmo.org had very few. Legislator relationships and improved communication will be important as regulatory matters arise on our journey.

P.1.b. Community Excellence Group

P.1.b. (1) Mission, Vision and Values

NAVIGATIONAL GUIDE	
VISION	Be a model sustainable support system for regional community collaboration.
MISSION	Bring Northwest Missouri communities together to dream big, grow leaders and collaborate across all sectors of health care, economics, education, and quality of life enabling positive transformation and vitality.
PURPOSE	Overcome the consequences of long-term economic decline, population loss, and the resulting threats to all sectors by promoting and supporting a spirit of systematic inclusive action. Through these efforts, we exist to assist the region, building leadership capability and capacity to sustain successful existing and new community development efforts. Leaders and residents throughout the region are empowered to identify and prioritize challenges, strengths, and opportunities most important to them by following a proven framework that serves to sustain, and transform this place where people love to live, learn, work, and play.
	VALUES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident, Visitor, Stakeholder, Partner, and Collaborator Engagement • Integrity, Honesty, and Transparency • Valuing Diversity and Inclusiveness • Open Communication • Focus on the Future • Building and Sharing Knowledge • Community Systems Perspective • Encouraging Innovation

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Figure P.1.b.(1)

P.1.b. (2) Composition and P.1.b. (3) Leadership System

A key component of the operating system is organizing people and conversations throughout the region to ensure as many are included in decision-making as possible. This inclusive approach requires a new way of looking at leadership structure. A distributed leadership model, a “Team of Teams”, is the structure that matches best with what naturally exists and is possible to further develop in the environment of communities and regions. We have four interactive groups. These teams and leaders will serve as the primary work systems, along with coaches and trainers, to produce programs, services and processes described in P.1.b (4&5).

- 1. REGIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – Vision Observers and Influencers:**
Includes a diverse range of Residents and Customers. Everyone tied to the region is included. The whole community surrounds the Guiding Coalition and Action Network.
- 2. REGIONAL ACTION NETWORK – Vision Implementers and Influencers:**
Includes **CollaborACTION** and **Discovery Groups** within core areas of community, communications, and strategic priorities.
- 3. REGIONAL GUIDING COALITION – Vision Influencers and Setters, Keepers, Supporters, and Facilitators**
Partner Council that includes senior leaders such as CEOs, owners, elected officials, department directors, etc. are considered essential strategic partners.
The **Navigation Team** and its day-to-day operations extension, the **Network Coordination and Support** are the foundational people responsible for coordination and facilitation of the above groups and activity.

P.1.b (4) Programs and Services and P.1.b (5) Suppliers, Partners, and Collaborators

The Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework is our “operating system” and transformation guide. There are five milestones in this repeating cycle. Breaking it down further, there are 12 steps with community engagement and commitment to work together in the first; visioning and values agreement, Community Profile development, and learning about the bigger picture of the Communities of Excellence Framework taking place in the second milestone; guided through strategic action together and communication in the third; using the framework to help check alignment and assess performance in the fourth; and, celebrating progress in the fifth milestone.

The framework is the basis of how the Guiding Coalition is organizing its work as well as the model we are sharing with other community leaders and residents through our first Regional Learning Collaborative held from January-August 2021. Complementing the operating system are our three strategic priorities (Community Leadership Capacity- And Capability-Building, Regional Shared Priorities and Knowledge Support, and Communications and Regional Backbone Support) that will enable new Programs and Services to evolve.

The primary offerings or programs are:

- 1) Regional Community Forums featuring relevant research, key questions, story sharing, and progress celebration;
 - 2) Facilitation of all the groups and teams mentioned in P.1.b. (2);
 - 3) A Regional Learning Collaborative serving as a “Group Tour through The Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework” for a cohort of leaders from multiple communities and organizations; and,
 - 4) Dedicated community-centered coaching and support for individual local communities within the region entitled “The Monarch Guided Expedition through The Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework.
- The additional steps and decision support included in our operating system exist to help fill the access and affordability gap of small rural communities who are essential to our larger regional community, but unable to participate in COE 2026’s National Learning Collaborative on their own. The Suppliers, Partners, and Collaborators listed on P.1.a (4) are, and will be, essential to the ongoing co-creation and sustainment of the operating system.



Figures P.1.b.(4)

MILESTONE 1	MILESTONE 2	MILESTONE 3	MILESTONE 4	MILESTONE 5
DISCOVER & FORM through inspiration and information	ENVISION, PRIORITIZE, & DESIGN while developing skills, relationships, trust, & strategic action maps	ENGAGE & EMPOWER collaborACTION teams & communicate wins	SUSTAIN & ALIGN to accelerate progress, dedication, & continuous improvement	CELEBRATE & GROW transformation
Step 1: Discover and create a sense of urgency. Step 2: Gather and form a guiding coalition of as many sectors and resident perspectives as possible.	Step 3: Forge a consensus & a community vision. Step 4: Develop a Communities of Excellence 2026 Community Profile & learn about systems-thinking. Step 5: Discuss & prioritize with all sectors & groups. Step 6: Agree & commit to shared vision, values & opportunity priorities. Step 7: Design strategic action maps based on in-depth quality data and stakeholder experience & learn about design-thinking.	Step 8: Engage & empower collaborACTION teams to work through the action maps for each priority. Step 9: Generate & share wins along the way.	Step 10: Sustain accelerated progress & dedication through support & networking. Step 11: Align & connect to continuously improve performance and short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes.	Step 12: Celebrate & grow transformation through pausing to recognize success and assess for areas of improvement.

Figures P.1.b.(4)

P.2 Community Situation: What is your community’s strategic situation?

P.2.a. Competitive Environment

P.2.a. (1) Competitive Position

While our work supports regional cooperation (*common interest priorities and projects*) our primary focus is on empowering CollaborACTION (*shared interest priorities and projects that are actively pursued, measured, and improved over the short-, mid-, and long-term*). One of the barriers to vitality in rural small towns is the desire to “win against their neighbor” rather than join forces to compete together with other U.S. and global regions. The research we conducted in 2020 2021 also tells us that fostering a sense of belonging and appreciation for this “place” is critical to reversing population decline by keeping and attracting entrepreneurial and skilled talent. Socially and economically, NWMO competes with other areas for talent, markets, and resources. Maximize NWMO aims to help the region discover through fact-informed design-thinking and decision-making when it is healthy to compete and when it is better to cooperate/collaborate.

NWMO’s biggest economic challenge is that we are primarily production based, with the traded sector rooted in agriculture and manufacturing while the key drivers of the U.S. economy are information, research, and innovation. The region has an opportunity to grow by expanding these drivers where it makes sense to our roots so more younger residents choose to stay here. Missouri is experiencing the same issue as indicated by the GDP. Focusing on comprehensive community development instead of any one sector will help us become more competitive.

P.2.a. (2) Competitiveness Changes and P.2.a. (3) Comparative Data

Missouri and NWMO have not recovered from the last recession when compared to the U.S., and 13 neighboring Midwestern states from 2009-2018. The trend is starting to shift but many leaders, communities, and businesses have been slow to embrace the global economy and advance technology. Younger residents are left without the same jobs and quality of life their grandparents and parents found. There are exceptions and there is an opportunity to bring back former residents who are seeking assets such as those mentioned in P.1.a(1).

P.2.b. Strategic Context

P.2.b. (1) Core Competencies

NWMO has a statewide regional reputation for collaborative thinking and sharing that is unique and advantageous. However, until we have completed extensive regional and local asset mapping, gap analysis, identifying opportunities and benchmark comparisons, our region’s leaders do not fully know the region’s strategic potential. The first round of implementing the Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework is proving helpful in leading a larger number of leaders down a promising path towards a transformed culture and sustainable community development competencies.

P.2.b (2) Challenges and Advantages

CHALLENGES	ADVANTAGES
Behind surrounding regions that have a 15-year head start in entrepreneurship ecosystem building.	Strong regional partners collaborating such as DED, USDA, MU, pilot communities, etc.
Communities often prone to focus on negative aspects, not assets	Positive history of regional collaboration, sharing and planning
Lack of knowledge of what all of the region’s current assets and opportunities are that could be leveraged.	Willingness of many stakeholders to participate in asset-mapping and discovery group discussions.
Significant gaps in high-speed broadband coverage	Strong educational institutions
Shortage of quality housing and child care	Opportunity to attract those moving out of metro areas
Lack of understanding and availability of support needed for second-stage and traded economy eSHIP.	Adequate and growing ecosystem support for start-up entrepreneurs, small businesses, and innovative ideas.
Traded sector over reliance on manufacturing & agriculture.	Geographic proximity to Kansas City, Omaha, and Des Moines
Boards directing economic developers focused on attraction more than “growing our own” make it difficult for those professionals to engage in more diverse and productive community development.	Citizens within most communities of the region identify with and support each other. Regional identity and pride is good and has potential for being great.

P.2.b (3) Performance Improvement System

Maximize NWMO’s proven approach for performance improvement is the Baldrige-based Communities of Excellence Framework within our own The Maximize [Your Community] Journey Framework in P.1.b (4).