

## Healthy Climate

*Values-Led, Resident-Centered and Place-Based Sustainable Development*

incourage

Incourage Community Enterprises makes its home in the Midwestern city of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. Situated in rural south Wood County, Incourage's geographical reach covers 200 square miles and a population base of approximately 45,000. As a philanthropy and local investor, Incourage:

- Has committed all of its resources to realizing a community that works well for all people, through regional development grounded in values of equity, opportunity and shared stewardship.
- Practices shared stewardship for people and planet—optimizing the health and wellbeing of local residents, while preserving the region's natural resources as recreational and economic assets.
- Understands that its community's economic drivers have, for over a century, tapped regional and national timber, agriculture, fossil fuel and mineral reserves without a full accounting of related risks to global climate, human health and the sustainability of natural resources.

Incourage works with residents in the region to forge an adaptive—and increasingly proactive—response. Incourage uses a “connected capitals” lens to engage a full range of institutional and community assets—moral, human, social, intellectual, reputational and natural, as well as financial. Solutions emerge, the community drives positive, long-term change and success is gained as institutions and residents work together to realize a community that works well for all people, with all forms of capital strengthened in the process.

Climate risk is palpable in central Wisconsin and goes hand-in-hand with economic risk. In a region whose livelihood has long depended on paper mills and farms, residents have experienced the boom and bust of global markets in timber and agriculture. They have also seen the degrading effects these and newer industries, such as frac sand mining, can have on the region's pristine natural resources.

Of mounting—if less visible—concern is the region and state's costly dependency on fossil fuels. These represent over 80% of Wisconsin energy sources at an out-of-state annual spend of \$15.9 billion—some \$2,700 for every person (Climate Forward, 2014). Beyond the financial cost, fossil fuels are the major cause of state air pollution, require vast quantities of water to cool power plants and present significant human health risks. The [Clear Air Task Force](#) estimates a risk of 169 annual deaths in Wisconsin associated with power plant emissions. More generally, [particle pollution](#) causes diminished lung function, greater use of asthma medications and increased rates of school absenteeism, emergency room visits and hospital admissions.

These facts call for a cogent, proactive response as part of Incourage's work with local residents. Transitioning the regional economy and energy strategy to reinforce health and sustainability requires vision, sound policy and entrepreneurial spirit, along with access to both information and capital.

South Wood County residents have a vision for sustainable natural resources, voiced in surveys as well as their design contributions to the community's Tribune building (see below). To accelerate progress, Incourage is working in partnership with the USDA and others to provide farms, businesses, government agencies and households with the information and capital they need to reduce energy use, increase promising renewables use, optimize transportation options (including walkability and other forms of active transportation), optimize carbon storage in living landscapes, and promote environmentally sustainable products and processes.

These goals reflect the prioritized steps to a healthy climate outlined in the 2014 Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters report, [Climate Forward](#). For Incourage and central Wisconsin residents, they also aim to create an energy value chain that drives the regional economy, creates green jobs for residents at a range of skill levels and fosters healthy human development over the life course.

In this work, Incourage builds on Wisconsin's early lead in energy innovation, which through bipartisan efforts enacted the nation's first renewable portfolio standard (RPS) in 1999. In 2006, Wisconsin set a goal of 10% of retail sales from renewable resources for all electricity providers, which the state achieved two years ahead of schedule in 2013. Wisconsin leads the nation in the number of animal-waste-to-energy systems, is among the top 10 ethanol producing states (using both corn and cheese whey as feedstocks), and possesses 150 hydropower dams as well as increasing numbers of solar and wind installations. Though promising, these and other renewable power sources require continued innovation to optimize efficiency and minimize risks.

More recently, however, needed public support for energy conservation and innovation in Wisconsin has wavered. At the [state government level](#), Wisconsin's proud history of bipartisan support for environmental conservation is under threat. Among Wisconsin's [public utilities](#), changes are underway that will undermine the state's transition to renewable energy including solar power. A number of surrounding states are surpassing Wisconsin's clean energy standards, heightening the importance of conducive policy and targeted investment within the state to deliver on the dual environmental and economic promise of renewable energy.

In the absence of robust policy direction, Incourage is taking a lead to ensure that Wisconsin's progress toward a healthier and more environmentally sustainable future builds on the state's strong history, while incorporating learning from national and global initiatives such as the [Risky Business](#) report (2014), [Paris COP21](#) (2015) and the [Breakthrough Energy Coalition](#) spearheaded by Bill Gates. Specific current initiatives include:

- [Tribune](#) – Incourage is spearheading the City's first LEED certified building, a flagship, resident-driven development located on the Wisconsin River in downtown Wisconsin Rapids. A community accelerator, the Tribune will combine supports for entrepreneurs building a sustainable local economy with education on green design principles, community space including a local brewery and brewpub and recreational rentals for enjoyment of the river and surrounding areas.
- [Blueprints for Tomorrow](#) – This 25-month Incourage and USDA-backed program is building networks, vision and skills to lead a regional economy based on values of equity, opportunity and shared stewardship. Teams from participating public agencies and social enterprises are developing a regional food system value chain linked to anchor institutions; a plan for a vibrant and walkable downtown including blue way river and recreational trail routes; health-promoting projects, including a new YMCA; and energy efficiency and safety upgrades to local affordable housing.
- [Capital Stewardship](#) – Incourage's board of directors has committed to 100% alignment of assets to mission and values. Holdings include Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that are active partners in providing capital to ensure that the advantages of regional green building and sustainable development are accessible to all of the region's businesses, farms and households. In parallel, Incourage is implementing an investment strategy that highlights Wisconsin-focused corporations with strong environmental and equitable labor practices, while simultaneously exercising shareholder activism to influence corporations active in the region whose operations do not meet these standards.

As Incourage works with residents to incorporate environmentally sustainable design elements across their efforts to realize a community that works well for all people, it also offers investment and partnership opportunities to regional and national investors, funders and agencies. Whether of interest from a Wisconsin, Midwest, rural community or broader sustainability framework, Incourage welcomes dialogue on specific investment and funding opportunities, and offers an ongoing commitment to report impact, incorporate emerging field insights and share lessons learned on the ground.

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