



PROSPERA

Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Prospera
865 Technology Blvd, Suite A
Bozeman, MT 59718
406-587-3113
ProsperaMT.org

ORIGINS

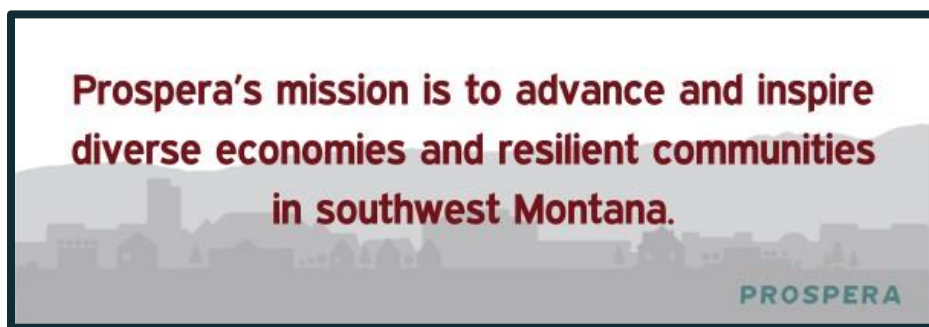
Prospera is a non-profit organization advancing community-centered business development in southwest Montana. Founded in 1985, Prospera emerged at the intersection of business and community, dedicated to fortifying businesses and the regional economy. In its early days, Prospera spearheaded initiatives to recruit new businesses to the area, initiated a community driven revolving loan fund, and garnered widespread backing for local industry. During this period, the economy faced slow growth, prompting a concerted effort to attract high-paying job opportunities.

Beginning in the early 2000's, Prospera gained momentum and broadened its influence, achieving new milestones in its endeavor to enhance businesses and stimulate regional economic growth. By 2006, the organization extended its services to Gallatin and Park counties, assumed management of local loan funds, and launched the Montana Women's Business Center in 2010. In 2012, the Montana Department of Commerce designated Prospera as a Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC), opening avenues for the organization to be the premier business and community development organization in southwest Montana. These milestones facilitated the establishment of future innovative programs and collaborations.

In 2020, our focus shifted to assist thousands of clients in their COVID recovery efforts, aiding them in accessing financial support through funding and grant programs, while also providing essential business technical assistance. Building on our commitment to the region, we expanded our services with the establishment of a Food and Agriculture Development Center and a Small Business Development Center. Continuing our strategic initiatives, in 2022, Prospera moved into a new business center, amplifying our client services through additional training programs, increased business grant opportunities, and expanded access to loan funds.

For nearly 40 years, our primary focus has been providing business advising, technical assistance, and access to capital for our clients. Concurrently, behind the scenes, we have built strategic partnerships with government agencies and rural communities to assist with local and regional planning to strengthen and build a resilient economic foundation.

Today, Prospera is the leading business and community development organization serving one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. We help businesses and communities find their pathway to success, acting as the navigator, problem solver, and catalyst for a strong Montana economy. Our staff of 11 uses the Entrepreneurship Operating System (EOS) for management and focuses on our mission and long-term positive outcomes for the people and communities we serve.



Our Values

We lean on our values as a measure of success. As we work with businesses and communities, we aim to live up to these values to continue improving our services and programs.

Integrity	provide confidential client services and helpful professional referrals
Leadership	listen, and lead positive change so people and communities can thrive
Service	offer high-quality services to people, businesses, and communities
Innovation	create innovative and responsive programs that make a positive impact
Partnerships	improve our effectiveness through public and private partnerships

OUR GOALS AND FOCUS

- **Strengthen local businesses and emerging companies.**
Through our comprehensive suite of services, including business advising, loan funding, and development grants, we actively support both startups and well-established businesses across Montana. Prospera serves as an essential resource and catalyst for business success, offering guidance to companies as they navigate the next phase of their business journey. Our crucial role involves facilitating a clear understanding of funding opportunities, ensuring businesses can access the resources necessary for their growth without unnecessary barriers.
- **Build a support system for business & community.**
By leveraging our community connections, expert-led trainings, and business events, we foster strong relationships that empower people to collaboratively overcome challenges. Our ecosystem benefits both business leaders and community organizations, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and solutions, as well as introducing individuals to outside expertise. This dynamic network is essential for adapting to the rapid changes in the economy and effectively addressing the evolving needs of growing communities.
- **Champion progress for rural towns and a regional economy.**
Through our strategic partnerships and innovative initiatives, we will actively champion progress for rural towns and the regional economy, serving as a positive and proactive advocate for community-centered economic development. In times of crisis, such as the Yellowstone River flood recovery and the challenges brought about by the pandemic, Prospera has been a steadfast supporter of local businesses. We collaborate with local governments to launch grant and microloan programs, providing crucial support to stabilize the economy. Our outreach efforts and remote learning initiatives aim to bring essential resources to our rural communities, enabling them to actively participate in and contribute to the broader regional economy.
- **Provide for a well-supported and healthy organization.**
Our work is centered around people, emphasizing the crucial role of a robust and well-supported team in ensuring the success of our operations and clients. In a maturing community and a rapidly evolving economy, the need for organizational resources becomes imperative to meet client expectations and retain qualified individuals on our staff. To fortify our long-term sustainability, we aim to enhance visibility and outreach, thereby diversifying our funding support and bolstering our organizational capacity. This strategic approach will not only support our dedicated team but also ensure our continued effectiveness in the face of dynamic challenges.

OUR WORK AND SNAPSHOT

Prospera helps businesses and communities find their pathway to success, acting as the navigator, problem solver and catalyst for a strong Montana economy.



ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Loan and grant funding for business & community projects.

Access to Capital

Prospera provides vital loan financing for businesses and community projects that conventional sources are not able to provide. We specialize in gap financing, collaborating with banks, private equity, and other non-profit community organizations to bridge funding shortfalls, transforming ideas into reality. With agency funding continually changing, we stay agile, adapting swiftly to emerging priorities. Presently, Prospera manages a portfolio of over \$5 million in revolving loan funds, and we are continually expanding our lending capabilities to better serve our clients and communities.



BUSINESS ADVISING & TRAININGS

Personal support for every phase of your business.

Business Advising & Trainings

Prospera provides comprehensive support, ranging from startup assistance for entrepreneurs to personalized, in-depth business advising for existing growth companies across all stages of their development. Our offerings extend to peer mentoring programs and expert-led professional trainings tailored to anyone that is starting or expanding their Montana-based business. This client-focused approach integrates coaching, mentoring, and problem-solving elements, empowering individuals behind the business to take the strategic steps towards success. With an annual impact on over 1,200 business leaders, we host more than 50 trainings each year, catering to diverse needs through both in-person and remote formats.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Strategic partnerships to accelerate positive outcomes.

Community Development

Prospera partners with organizations, cities, and rural communities to address local needs and navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing economy. Serving as connectors and problem-solvers, we actively engage with communities dealing with issues such as downtown revitalization, housing, child-care, access to broadband, and other essential infrastructure for economic success. This aspect of work is both opportunistic and long-term, as we respond to emerging issues and provide support by identifying funding and expertise to help communities address critical needs. An exemplary success story is our swift response to support Yellowstone Fiber, where Prospera's key financing played a crucial role in enabling Montana's only open-access fiber network to secure \$65 million in industrial revenue bonds, leading to expansion.



PEER NETWORKING

Bringing people together to make meaningful connections.

Peer Networking

Prospera organizes diverse business events and roundtables, offering invaluable peer mentoring opportunities within the business community. In a fast-growing community, this work is continually evolving. Our objective is to curate exceptional experiences, ensuring the right people connect at the right time. Beyond fostering networking opportunities, Prospera's events provide a platform showcasing some of the most innovative individuals, companies and projects in the region. This inclusive approach allows everyone to actively participate and contribute to the transformations within our changing economy.

*numbers reported from 2023 and prior

A REGIONAL ECONOMY CREATES OPPORTUNITIES

The foundation of business and community success lies in the quality of people, the allure of last-best places, and the unique Montana quality of life. In this mutual dependence, the vitality of businesses intertwines with the prosperity of the community, emphasizing the need for our work to support people, community, and the cherished quality of life we value.

Gallatin and Park counties host nearly 15% of Montana's population and hold about 15% of all the state bank deposits. When you include the regional retail trade area – a 140-mile radius from Bozeman – our economic region encompasses southwest Montana, parts of Idaho, and Yellowstone National Park. This expansive region hosts over four million visitors annually to Yellowstone.

Southwest Montana and Bozeman, its largest city, has experienced remarkable growth, ranking as one of the fastest growing regions in the U.S. for over two decades. Bozeman's population surpassed 50,000 in 2020, elevating it to the status of a new metropolitan area joining Great Falls, Billings, and Missoula. Additionally, the City of Belgrade, now one of the fastest growing communities in Montana, has entered the top 10 cities by population and is projected to triple in size within 15 years, reaching 30,000 residents.



Factors shaping regional opportunities

- BZN Yellowstone International Airport stands as Montana's busiest airport, experiencing continuous growth with nearly 2 million deplanements annually. The majority of travelers include Montanans and individuals on business-related trips.
- Big Sky Resort Area District has identified a need for \$741 million in capital improvements for Big Sky over the next decade positioning the area for substantial growth and development.
- Between 12-20% of the region's workforce is categorized as "remote" workers, equating to 1,000s of people working from home and shaping the landscape of employment in southwest Montana.
- Southwest Montana has an impressive 90% workforce participation rate, surpassing the national average.
- Notably, the fastest-growing demographic in Montana comprises people over the age of 65, while the region has seen 50,000 residents exit the workforce in the past decade.
- There is a critical mass of emerging-tech companies in southwest Montana in the fields of photonics and sensors, climate mitigation, outdoor equipment, and biosciences. This presents substantial opportunities for businesses, research, product development and employment. Prospera's involvement

as a consortium member of the Headwaters Tech Hub, underscores the regional commitment to advancing the photonics and remote sensory industries in Montana.

- Gallatin County boasts a young population, with the median age of approximately 35 years, which is much younger than neighboring counties and Montana overall.
- The current population of Gallatin County is 118,000 (2022) and is expected to grow to 145,000 by 2030, indicating sustained growth at a rate of about 3,400 new residents per year.
- Regional economic studies for Gallatin and Park counties emphasize key goals in areas such as workforce development, infrastructure enhancement, and collaborative regional efforts, shaping the direction of economic development in the region.
- Bozeman has formed a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in collaboration with Gallatin County and the City of Belgrade. This federal designation enables regional planning and secures direct federal funding for critical areas such as transportation and community development.
- More than 90% of businesses in the area have fewer than 20 employees, which enforces the fact that small businesses ARE the business community. Southwest Montana also exhibits a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, with significant startup activity that showcases the emergence of inspiring new business ventures.

These regional opportunities mean Prospera will need to grow and adapt so we have the capacity to support businesses and communities in new ways.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO 2028

In 2023, Prospera served nearly 1,200 business and community clients in Montana through our core initiatives. The significance of our positive impact for the individuals and communities we serve extends far beyond the number. To provide a more comprehensive understanding, here are noteworthy highlights from the past few years that vividly illustrate the diversity and range of our clientele.



- Advisory services were provided to over 100 agricultural producers and food-makers, resulting in the successful securing of over \$1 million in funding for these clients.
- 165 women have participated in our 56Strong mentoring program that connects women business owners and leaders statewide.
- 10 tech and manufacturing companies received more than \$1 million in business development funding for company expansions, creating jobs and new private investments.
- Prospera secured more than \$6 million in state loan funds for 4 business expansions, and in the process, secured a new future \$3 million loan fund for our region.

- After years of effort, the City of Livingston is creating a downtown development plan that will set the stage for new investments in its historic city center.
- Over 150 individuals received business startup training, utilizing the acquired skills to launch new businesses in Montana.
- HRDC's Homeward Point emergency housing project, is under construction, with a \$250,000 community loan from Prospera and the City of Bozeman (a collaborative effort with the Bozeman Area Chamber of Commerce).
- Through our Emerging Companies Roundtable, 45 local growth companies have engaged in meaningful networking, establishing vital connections with their peers to foster the thriving success of their businesses.
- After receiving critical loan funding from Prospera, Yellowstone Fiber sold \$65 million in industrial revenue bonds to build-out Montana's only open access fiber optic network to every home and business in Bozeman.
- A mobile home court in Belgrade is a new resident-owned-community with a \$650,000 loan from Prospera, Gallatin County and the City of Belgrade - a first-time partnership project with NeighborWorks Montana.
- After 10 years of organizing and providing management support, Montana Photonics & Quantum Alliance has spun-off as their own non-profit and is now the industry-lead partner for the new Headwaters Tech Hub.

These examples highlight the tangible impact of our work on businesses and communities. Looking forward to 2028, our goal is to increase the number of clients served annually from 1,200 to 2,000 through our core actions and innovative initiatives. This expansion, which will involve the creation of new programs and events, is coupled with targeted outreach to rural communities. We inspire to forge new partnerships with local communities and educational organizations, intensifying our efforts in workforce development and community vitality, as we identify these as crucial needs.

These new strategic initiatives are designed to engage a broader audience, allowing us to effectively address the pressing needs of our region. While we have already begun implementing some of these strategies, our effectiveness hinges on additional staff capacity dedicated to creating new partnerships and leading actions that drive positive outcomes.

Recognizing that the solutions we seek require a long-term commitment and time, to gather resources and implement, we are launching a multi-year fundraising effort in 2024. The objective is to secure the necessary funding that will enable us to promptly act on this strategic plan. Prospera's unique position as a local non-profit empowers us to swiftly assess the needs of the business community and shape new programs that yield impactful results.

1. BUSINESS AND ECONOMY



This core program area for Prospera will continue to support and strengthen entrepreneurship and local companies in every phase of their business. As we look ahead, we see an opportunity for a significant impact on the regional economy by extending our reach to more individuals in rural communities. Embracing creative ideas around financing options and offering industry-specific education to businesses are key components of our strategy. The fast-developing photonics/quantum industry, currently employing over 800 people in Gallatin Valley, presents a unique chance for growth and international recognition. We aim to position ourselves as a valuable resource for this industry, contributing to its expansion in photonics, optics and sensing, remote and autonomous vehicles, and quantum materials.

Focus on Innovation

- **Rural Community Outreach:** Collaborate with resource partners to introduce new events and in-person business advisory services in rural communities enhancing the connection between business owners and our support eco-system.
- **Alternative Financing and Community Investing:** hold our first Alternative Financing Workshop in 2024, to explore creative financing solutions for business and community projects, along with new ideas for impact investing.
- **Microloans:** Identify funding and develop a plan to launch microloans, up to \$25,000, catering to small businesses with unmet needs, particularly those in their early stages.
- **Dynamic Training and Roundtables:** Develop new topics and themes for business trainings and roundtables to keep up with rapid changes in the economy and technology, ensuring we meet the evolving needs of local businesses.

Business Development

- Collaborate with the Headwaters Tech Hub to support the advancement of the photonics and remote sensory industries in Montana, including active involvement in the phase II funding proposal.
- Seek collaborative efforts with the Montana Photonics & Quantum Alliance and Montana State University (MSU) to drive advancements for regional economic and business development.
- Facilitate access to loans, grants, and financing options to empower entrepreneurs and existing businesses, with an emphasis on reaching rural clients.
- Provide support for small and medium sized businesses through mentorship, networking opportunities, training, and advising.
- Offer targeted assistance to companies aiming to expand their markets beyond Montana, facilitating their growth on a broader scale.
- Increase the availability of support in rural communities through business expos, and in-person connections, ensuring accessibility for advising and training.

2. PEOPLE AND WORKFORCE

Scale Capacity to Tackle Workforce Needs

Montana businesses are grappling with the challenge of finding skilled and talented individuals to hire, given the scarcity of available workforce. Our goal is to launch a Regional Workforce Development Program, aiming to counter this trend and build a robust workforce pipeline that supports the future growth of our business community. The program will spearhead collaborative efforts among educators, industry sectors, and companies to expedite results, place individuals in crucial roles, and equip students and educators with insights into industry trends within our changing economy.

Focus on People: Workforce and community development must align to ensure the presence of adequate assets for the sustained success of our economy. Incorporating housing and childcare into the equation is essential to provide our workforce with choices and options that support their needs. These sustained efforts demand dedicated staffing and consistent attention to yield tangible results.

Actions

- Support the expansion and development of a new Gallatin College facility at MSU.
- Support the pathway of micro-credentialing being developed for the MT University System.
- Actively participate in the workforce development programs underway at MSU, the Headwaters Tech Hub, and partner organizations.
- Survey businesses to identify training needs for their employees, creating pathways for skill enhancement and workforce retention.
- Develop new programming for K-12 students and teachers to broaden their understanding of workforce opportunities and available pathways.
- Plan innovative events and activities aimed at expanding the workforce pipeline and attracting new talent to our communities for sustained business success.
- Expand connections with MSU and other regional institutions to encourage more companies to utilize internships and apprenticeships for workforce growth.

Workforce Strategies

- **Education** – create experiences that link businesses and employment opportunities with students and companies, ensuring the education community can keep pace with fast changes in business and technology.
- **Pipeline** – Establish pathways for individuals into current and future job opportunities. Assist growing companies in building their own workforce pipeline, connecting with the education system and attracting talent.
- **Skill Building** – Provide training for the existing workforce to enhance productivity and prepare for changes. Address local companies' training needs for workforce retention.
- **Talent Attraction** – Target key sectors for workforce attraction and recruitment, offering support to attract workforce to vital business sectors and linking resources to address housing and childcare needs.



3. PLACE AND COMMUNITY

Scale Capacity to Lead New Community Vitality Strategies

“We shape our buildings and thereafter our buildings shape us” - Winston Churchill

Intentional acts of community building are fundamental to the creation of great communities and a high quality of life. A crucial aspect of our economic success involves addressing community infrastructure needs, to ensure the prosperity of both small towns and fast-growing cities. Our goal is to be a strategic partner, supporting local and regional efforts for downtown revitalization, infill development, innovations in housing and child-care, infrastructure and more. Building great places requires a long-term commitment to transform ideas into reality. This program aims to bring together business and community resources, securing the funding needed to enhance the quality of life we all desire. Leaving these challenges to chance is not an option.

Focus on Placemaking: Scale up a community vitality program that can proactively contribute to positive developments in our communities, creating spaces for people and businesses, while preserving our quality of life.

Actions

- Engage in regional planning with the new Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in Gallatin County and explore collaborative solutions to regional issues.
- Be a funding catalyst and develop new financing tools for community projects such as housing, childcare, and community facilities, by providing funding solutions that address local needs.
- Partner with local governments and non-profit entities to develop collaborative efforts for new projects and new capacity.
- Promote innovative solutions for community development that provide spaces for people, businesses, and community activities.
- Link efforts with workforce development programs to ensure that people have access to resources that grow the workforce pipeline.

Community Vitality Strategies

- **Community Building** – Support infill development initiatives, especially in rural communities, through innovative design and new investments.
- **Innovation** – Ensure our region is prepared for the rapid changes coming in transportation, mobility, and the digital workforce influencing the design and construction of cities.

- **Infrastructure** – Address the need for soft and hard assets in business and community infrastructure.
- **Funding** – Seek new funding opportunities to assist communities in planning for the future and implementing impactful projects.
- **Policy** – Support policies and solutions for new public-private partnerships that yield positive outcomes.

ACTIONS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS

Prospera's capacity to make a significant impact requires scaling new capacity for PEOPLE AND WORKFORCE and PLACE AND COMMUNITY initiatives. Our ability to make an impact will not be fully realized without new staff capacity, that can devote time and energy for program development. Opportunities with the Headwaters Tech Hub and funding at the state and federal levels are currently underway and should be leveraged to bring additional resources into our communities.

To do this, we need additional staff capacity for workforce development and community vitality efforts along with administrative support for the programs as they mature. This new capacity needs at least three years of funding to make a meaningful impact. The actions we have planned include:

- **Hire New Program Leaders.** Aim to hire two positions, one for workforce development and another for community vitality. These roles will lead proactive efforts working with people and communities to identify projects that address critical issues. This capacity building will attract project funding, launch new programs and partnerships with local agencies, and build solutions that do not exist today.
- **Become a Community Strategic Partner.** With new capacity, Prospera can strategically advance workforce development programs, support housing solutions, bolster vital infrastructure and initiate new community projects that address local needs. This support is often in the form of funding resources. We can utilize our own loan funds or outside resources. We aim to be a catalyst for positive community outcomes so our towns and rural communities can participate in a fast-changing economy.
- **Resource the Prospera team.** To support new program work, we will continue to invest in our people and operations so that we are effective. This will include additional staff, office space, equipment, technology resources, and professional services to ensure the success of our new program areas.



Multi-Year Commitments

Prospera plans to launch a fundraising effort that will seek multi-year commitments from supporters to scale-up capacity for this strategic plan. The aim is to make substantial progress in 2024, seeking support from businesses, donors, foundations, and government agencies to enable this work. A 3-year commitment of funding is sought to make staffing and organization commitments to fully resource the effort.

Background

Prospera is home to several programs that provide *partial* funding for our business advising, training and technical assistance actions for Montana businesses. All these programs require matching funds from businesses and the community.

CRDC

Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC)

A program of the Montana Department of Commerce that supports community and economic development.



Food and Agriculture Development Center (FADC)

A program of the Montana Department of Agriculture, that aims to support value-added agriculture, local food businesses, and renewable energy.



Montana Women's Business Center (MTWBC)

A program of the SBA's Office of Women's Business Ownership that aims to support women-owned businesses and emerging companies.



Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

A program of the Montana Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration that supports start-ups and growth strategies for local companies.



Prospera Loan Program

Prospera manages local revolving loan funds for local governments, the USDA and the MT Board of Investment to finance business and community projects.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Prospera works and partners with many local and regional organizations to get things done. Many hands make for light work – and in most cases our success and impact would not be possible without the support and collaboration of others.

Accelerate Montana
Belgrade Chamber of Commerce
Big Sky Chamber of Commerce
Blackstone Launchpad
Bozeman Area Chamber of Commerce
City of Belgrade
City of Bozeman
City of Livingston
Destination Livingston
Downtown Bozeman Partnership
Early Stage Montana
Explore Livingston Coalition
Export Montana
Gallatin College
Gallatin County
Gardiner Chamber of Commerce
Headwaters Tech Hub
HRDC - Bozeman
Livingston Chamber of Commerce
Livingston Food Resource Center
MOFI

Montana APEX
Montana Department of Agriculture
Montana Department of Commerce
Montana Department of Labor & Industry
Montana Department of Transportation
Montana Economic Developers Association
Montana Manufacturing Extension Center
Montana Non-Profit Association
Montana Photonics & Quantum Alliance
Montana State University
Montana State University Extension
NeighborWorks Montana
Northern Rocky Mtn. Economic Dev. District
One Valley Community Foundation
Park County
Park County Community Foundation
Park Local
Tech Link
US Department of Agriculture
US Small Business Administration