

Section 1: Community or Constituencies to be served

The Region: The Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC) represents fifteen (15) communities in a 440 square mile region in west central Massachusetts (Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Monson, New Braintree, North Brookfield, Palmer, Spencer, Wales, Ware, Warren and West Brookfield). These towns fall between the cities of Worcester and Springfield and are comprised of over 20 densely populated former mill villages surrounded by rural areas and developing commuter neighborhoods. Half of the region is in Worcester County and residents of these towns orient to the city of Worcester while the remaining towns, in Hampden and Hampshire Counties, are oriented to Springfield and Northampton. Despite these outward pulls, the towns have more in common with each other than with the cities in that most are small; 10 of our 15 towns have populations of less than 7500. All 15 of our towns meet the state definition of “rural” which is defined “as a municipality in which there are fewer than 500 people per square mile”¹.

The population is predominately white (93%) with small numbers of African Americans, Asians, and Latine². The region has been characterized by chronic high unemployment – historically 1 to 2 points above the state averages. In September 2022, 8 of our 15 towns had unemployment rates above the state rate.³ There is corresponding underemployment since there are few large employers. The major employers are the municipalities and one community hospital (recently downsized from two). Such employment conditions contribute to the overall low-income status of the region. Warren and Ware, for example, with median household incomes of \$60,616 and \$56,877 respectively, fall well below the state median household income of \$89,645⁴. The result: underemployment and few job opportunities in our region mean many cannot find work at a living wage.

Recognition of the lack of access to capital for underserved small businesses in our region prompted the creation in 1995 of our sister nonprofit, the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (QVBAC). QVBAC provides loans to small businesses and microenterprises unable to qualify for equivalent financing. Over the years, QVBAC has made over \$4.6M in loans to support economic growth and create jobs. The creation of QV CDC in 1997 reflected the realization that loans were not enough; business development services and assistance with specific business issues were necessary to help our loan recipients succeed – and are offered to the broader small business community along with our other services. Other barriers to economic improvement including the lack of transportation in our region and access to education beyond high school, have been recognized as critical factors in our work on workforce and asset development.

¹ “Improving State-Sponsored Services in Massachusetts in Rural Communities” Rural Access Commission Report, EOHS, Aug 2013, pg. 5.)

² 2020 ACS 5-year estimates B02001

³ “12 Month Average Unemployment Rate” Mass.gov, Department of Unemployment Assistance, Economic Research Department

⁴ 2020 ACS 5-year estimates S1903

Education levels are significantly lower than Massachusetts' norms. Where 44.5% of Massachusetts residents have college degrees, within the Quaboag region the average is 29.7%⁵. There has been no post-secondary educational facility in the region, excluding the QV CDC's recent development, and there is still little public transportation out of the region for school or work. As is the case across the country, unemployed or undereducated residents may turn to proprietary job training or educational programs that, in fact, have few or no job placements. As a result, these individuals are left with unpaid loans that will never be forgiven and damaged credit.

In the 2014 CIP we wrote, "In general our target population includes people suffering from a set of conditions that creates an atmosphere of minimal opportunity: low educational levels, low income, unemployment, weak personal assets, no-post-secondary facilities and non-existent public transportation useable for education or employment purposes. " The Community Investment Tax Credit awards in 2014- 2022 provided the fundraising catalyst needed to address these community needs. Significant steps have been taken to build on our core small business lending, support, and workforce training activities to provide solutions to the problems cited in previous CIP's. These new programs include:

1. Growth of the Quirk Financial Fitness club, a financial skills-building and matched savings (IDA) program that supports saving for a business asset, first and last month's rent, an educational certificate or degree program, a reliable used car, or a necessary home appliance or repair.
2. E2E, Education to Employment: Quaboag Region Workforce Training and Community College Center. A 3,000 sq. ft. facility in downtown Ware providing supported online learning, and workforce training certificate courses with Holyoke Community College, Mass MEP and QV CDC.
3. The Quaboag Connector – an innovative transportation service primarily for work and education related travel in the Quaboag Region. Rides are prioritized for persons with disabilities and seniors.
4. Economic development projects in downtown Ware and the Palmer village of Three Rivers.
5. Increased support to municipalities addressing Covid-19 impacts, community health and well-being as vital ingredients for an economically healthy region.

Our region is on the eastern periphery of Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's service area and on the western periphery of Worcester Regional Transit Authority's service area. This has meant there are only two public transportation routes out of our region, each of which requires several transfers to reach metropolitan destinations. Accordingly, trips to Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton or Worcester are expensive and extremely time consuming. (See Attachment 1) There are no passenger rail or major bus line stops, but the potential for an East-West Rail stop in Palmer will make last mile service an important need.

⁵ 2020 census data, data.census.gov/cedsci

QV CDC sees the lack of transportation as a significant barrier to individual and community economic development in our region.

Constituencies: Our target customers are the residents and business owners who are struggling to achieve a living wage by living and working in our region. These include:

1. **Microenterprise Businesses** owned by low-moderate income (LMI) persons. They are typically modestly educated residents of the region operating service businesses such as contracting, agriculture, health and beauty, etc. They correspond racially and economically to our regional demographic.
2. **Job-creating small businesses** whose employees are primarily LMI. They tend to be established businesses with “entrepreneurial” owners. That is, they are strategic in their planning and operations and often have more education.
3. **Skill-seeking (LMI) individuals** wanting to obtain a job or advance in a job. These persons wish to improve their employment status by increasing their value as employees. They need new or improved skills. Our focus is on those with little education who live in our village areas. For example, seven of the ten school districts in the Quaboag region have dropout rates higher than the state average of 1.5%, ranging up to 3.8%⁶.
4. **Asset-deficient LMI individuals** struggle to reach a reasonable lifestyle but are restricted by a lack of personal resources. They are microenterprise businesses that need capital or equipment. They are adult students that need capital to go to college or other workforce training programs. They are adults of all ages who cannot get to college, work, or medical appointments for lack of reliable transportation. They come from all parts of the region and from households with low incomes and limited family assets.
5. **Municipalities** or member towns that need outside expertise to address specific town needs: Over time, QV CDC has been asked to address concerns that towns did not have the expertise to address themselves. Past projects include feasibility studies for a 110,000 SF vacant mill complex in the Hardwick village of Gilbertville, Neighborworks reinvest, and a blighted town-owned property in the Palmer village of Three Rivers. Current projects include the Quaboag Connector Rural transportation system, developing a Quaboag Region Community Health Improvement Plan, (CHIP), a Rural Vaccine and Health Equity project, Education to Employment, a project to engage youth in improving educational and employment outcomes.

Section 2: Involvement of Community Residents and Stakeholders

As a CDC since 1997 (and as a nonprofit lender, QVBAC, since 1995), the unique nature of our governance structure has allowed for maximum participation from the various communities we serve. It facilitates our ability to represent a sparsely populated 15-community region that spans 3 counties. We have built strong relationships with businesses, municipalities, regional Planning Commissions, nonprofit service providers, Chambers of Commerce, local banks, employers and community members from our 15 towns in the three counties. The QV CDC and

⁶ Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Dropout Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools: 2013 to 2021 Report Appendix A

QVBAC Boards are drawn from many of these groups (especially community members). Accordingly, we are in a unique position to facilitate the discussion with local and regional partners about solutions to regional economic development problems by addressing the factors that perpetuate them. It is our practice to continually engage residents and stakeholders in the community and at the Board level.

- a) **Board:** The QVCDC Board consists of 13 members elected at the annual membership meeting. The QVBAC Board is comprised of 23 members, all of whom are appointed by our towns, banks, or nonprofits. The two boards represent our constituencies and our region. Some are themselves low income and others represent LMI through their work or other affiliations. The Board has welcomed an Advisory Board of LMI small business people from the region who have and continue to use QVCDC's services in order to ensure maximum benefit. QVCDC's Board meets monthly and the QVBAC Board meets quarterly with the QVCDC Board. Board members provide input on community and constituent needs. The Boards make all policy and long-term planning decisions. There is an active committee structure including the Loan Committee, the Executive Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, and an Audit Committee. Included on our Boards are 2 CPA's, and an attorney who help to provide oversight. The Boards exercise strict financial control over both organizations. Our QVCDC and QVBAC Boards discussed, and unanimously endorsed our 2023 Community Investment Plan at the November 2022 Board meeting.
- b) **Community Engagement has been consistently used to develop and update QVCDC's Community investment Plan and activities:** As a relatively small organization QVCDC has been able to respond quickly to community needs as evidenced by projects taken on during the Covid-19 pandemic including:
 - a. Created a Rapid Response loan product to provide flexible critically needed loan capital to small business owners while grant programs were being developed
 - b. Worked with two planning commissions and two lead communities to assist with the DHCD Covid -19 Microenterprise grant program in 12 towns that awarded 59 grants, for \$835,650
 - c. Worked with DHCD to expand senior outreach program to two additional communities to address food, medicine, and isolation for frail seniors in 4 towns
 - d. Created a Rebound Loan product to provide lower cost loan capital to small businesses recovering from the impact of Covid-19.
 - e. Ware Resiliency project – 41 businesses assisted with social media and group marketing resources and support.
 - f. QVCDC convenes a monthly Quaboag Region Coordinating Council with 30 members including community members, local school and municipal staff, and representatives from the health care sectors to address transportation and other community needs. In addition, QVCDC hosted a community wide kick-off meeting for the CHIP attended by 35 people, and engaged a consultant to survey current and former borrowers, and stakeholders including municipal officials to better inform this plan.

- c) QVCDC staff interacts, collaborates and forges partnerships with **other community nonprofits, agencies, and organizations** in order to fulfill our mission as this chart illustrates:

Summary of Community Engagement

Organization	Constituency	LMI, Small Business, Stakeholder Engagement with QVCDC
<i>Non-profits</i>		
Ware Adult Learning Center (regional)	LMI seeking Hi Set (GED) and job skills	Identify barriers to education, employment. Provide program space.
The Health Foundation of Central Mass	Central Mass based foundation addressing social determinants of health.	Engaged in funding 5-year Synergy Initiative addressing rural transportation as part of the built environment.
Collaborative for Educational Services (CES)	Primarily residents of Hampshire County	Work on food insecurity and solutions engaging small farms.
Palmer Historical and Cultural Center	Nonprofit organization dedicated to making arts, historical and cultural activities affordable and available to regions' residents. Have provided leadership in Three Rivers revitalization.	Partners in TRACK, and anchor for revitalization activities in distressed and struggling village center of Three Rivers
Quaboag Hills Community Coalition	LMI residents through various service providers	Participate in regular meetings, took on leadership of the Transportation sub Committee.
Central Mass Grown	Farmer and farm product businesses in central Mass.	QuickBooks for Farmers classes and support for farmers with SB loans and loan packaging.
MIDAS Collaborative	LMI residents seeking financial capability and savings skills.	Partner and advisor in Quirk Financial Fitness Club activities.
Workshop 13	Nonprofit organization dedicated to making arts, historical and cultural activities affordable and available to regions' residents.	Collaborated on a Business Planning series for artists, a storefront for artisans and a working pottery studio.
Behavioral Health Network	Target LMI's with range of services	Provide Program space, Financial Fitness Club grew from this collaboration.
Western Mass Food Bank	LMI residents	Access to free produce and engagement on the CHIP

UMass Chan Medical at Baystate, PURCH Program	Quaboag Region residents	Embedding second year medical students in the community to help them become advocates for improvements in the social determinates of health.
Baystate Wing Hospital	Quaboag Region residents	Collaborate on programs, community coalition, education and transportation to increase health and well-being of community residents.
Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce	Businesses in 15 towns in Hampden, Hampshire and Worcester County	Jointly sponsor business-training events, and identify businesses eligible for assistance or funding.
Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce	Businesses in Hampden and Worcester Counties	Participate in Business training events and identify businesses eligible for assistance or funding.
Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce	Residents and business owners in Three Rivers village of Palmer	Partners in TRACK, an Adams Arts funded revitalization project.
Ware Business and Civic Association	Merchants in Ware's Central Business District	Participate in regular monthly meetings & events such as the Holiday Flair.
<i>Municipalities and Public Entities</i>		
Palmer Redevelopment Authority	Existing and potential business owners in Palmer	Partners in TRACK, and business planning classes for businesses potentially locating in Palmer.
Ware Community Development Department Small Business Loan Funds	Small Businesses located in Ware or Hardwick that provide employment to Low Income individuals	Underwrite and service small business loan funds through QVBAC. Also worked on Economic Revitalization Committee and Master Plan.
Ware Property Assessment and Re-Use project	50 distressed Commercial and residential properties determined to be blighted	Serve on advisory committee to find solutions for blighted properties in Ware.
Palmer Community Development Department	Businesses in 13 towns owned by or employing LMI's	Provide technical assistance, training, business planning training, and loans. Social service funding for Palmer Rides to Work.
Holyoke Community College	Primarily LMI residents seeking job skills	Partners in E2E, workforce and degree bearing educational activities.
SCORE	Prospective and existing small business owners	Regular participation in monthly meetings to address needs of small businesses. A board member of QVDCDC is a SCORE volunteer.

Central Mass Planning Commission	Central Mass Communities LMI residents	Collaboration on Quaboag Region transportation needs, assisted with Microenterprise grants
Southern Worcester Economic Development	Southern Worcester County residents and business community	Participation on Board of Directors
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	Western Mass Communities LMI residents	Participation on Valley Development Council, collaboration on transportation services, Mass in Motion and Healthy Aging projects.
Pioneer Valley Transit Authority	Western Mass Communities LMI residents	Collaboration on Quaboag Region transportation needs and services.
Worcester Regional Transit Authority	Central Mass Communities LMI residents	Collaboration on Quaboag Region transportation needs and services.
Mass DOT	Residents	Transportation services
Mass Mobility	Seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, low-income commuters, and others who lack transportation access in Massachusetts.	Participate in programs to provide and advance services for their constituency. Working to develop a sustainable model for rural transportation.
Mass Rehab	Disabled workers and small business owners	Computer training and business planning training
Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board	Job seekers and employers	Bring youth employment opportunities to Ware, collaborate to assist employers to find trained, qualified employees
Massachusetts Cultural Council	LMI artists and local residents	Use of the arts to revitalize economically distressed downtown Three Rivers and downtown Ware
Southbridge Economic Development Dept.	Residents and business owners in Southbridge	Training and support services for small business prospects and owners. Microenterprise grant assistance.
Sturbridge Economic Development Dept.	Residents and business owners in Sturbridge	Training and support services for small business prospects and owners. Microenterprise grant assistance.
Mass Growth Capital Corp.	Small business borrowers and loan fund providers	Collaboration on providing technical assistance and loans.

For example, work with the Ware Adult Learning Center and a supporting daycare program of the Behavioral Health Network on the design of the Financial Fitness Club brought emphasis to the lack of transportation as a major barrier to accessing secondary education, job training, and employment opportunities within and outside the region.

- d) QV CDC works closely with area **municipalities** by participating in studies, collaborations and partnerships on funding opportunities, leadership on projects that align with our mission and resources, reports to the Towns on our overall activities, and town representation on our Boards.
- e) Strong working relationships with our community banks, who sit on our QVBAC Board and participate in a loan pool line of credit, have been in place for 20 years.
- f) QV CDC engages stakeholders in the region with direct outreach through the media, via surveys, post-assistance follow-up questionnaires and significant personal contact. Staff regularly visit businesses throughout the region, asking about their needs and providing small business training and assistance.

Monitoring: Residents and other stakeholders monitor and participate in the implementation of our QV CDC activities through presentations to the Boards of the QV CDC and QVBAC, information in the media and on the website and social media, meetings with community members and continuing and expanding collaborations with area nonprofits, municipalities and businesses. Group insights are incorporated into process improvements. Surveys are used extensively.

Section 3: Plan Goals

GOAL 1, Strengthen the Local Economy by Fostering a Strong Small Business Community:

These efforts are a natural extension of our work over the years: we provide training to businesses to increase their employees' proficiency in the workplace. We offer 1 to 1 and group trainings in our computer lab, virtually, or at the business location and are a vendor for the Workforce Express Program. We provide detailed technical assistance, business development services and consulting to small businesses and microenterprises. In addition to loans from \$500-\$150,000 made by the QVBAC to businesses that cannot qualify for equivalent financing, QV CDC offers technical assistance to startups and small businesses to help pay consultants for accounting, legal, marketing and business planning assistance. For example, funding from the Mass Broadband Institute of the Mass Tech Collaborative to expand the use of broadband by small businesses in our region worked well, because QV CDC could leverage other funding sources to assist the businesses with additional business needs, such as basic computer training for a company about to adopt proprietary software, and consulting with a CPA for a company purchasing a more powerful and complex accounting software. Post assistance surveys showed impressive results including: increased efficiencies, increased sales and net revenue, increased competitiveness. Several companies were able to add jobs to the local economy. Experience has taught us that our resources are used most effectively when we work with the business owner to assess the needs and goals of the business, match them to available resources and follow up with the business to ensure that it remains on target to stabilize and grow.

GOAL 2, Workforce Development: We will assist small business to find employment -ready job candidates by working with our partner, Holyoke Community College, in *E2E, Education to Employment, The Quaboag Region Workforce Training and Community College Center*. This QV CDC facility puts certificate and related training and degree bearing programs within reach

of the region's LMI residents. This broad-based collaboration with the Regional Employment Boards, local municipalities, schools, and employers provides a respectful, supportive learning environment for education and job seeking people from the region. In addition, QVDCDC updated and expanded its equipment, technology and training staff in order to provide training online or onsite at businesses in Central and Western Massachusetts.

GOAL 3, Financial Skills-Building and Asset Development: Because few low-income individuals can afford to start a business, attend college or purchase reliable transportation, and some struggle with homelessness, QVDCDC has worked with partners to address this problem through a collaborative financial capability training and asset development initiative. The increased fundraising capacity provided by CITC was a major factor in the launch of the first-year pilot of the *Harrison and Diane Quirk Financial Fitness Club*. This 12-month program includes financial capability training and a matched savings (IDA) account for a targeted goal. The program has grown with support from additional funders. QVDCDC just launched its fourth cohort.

GOAL 4, Municipalities: We will continue to assist municipalities in our region by engaging in studies or consultation to address barriers to improved economic conditions by utilizing staff expertise when appropriate and bringing in consultants with specialized expertise when required. Our projects have included vacant mill projects, commercial or mixed- use development, a feasibility study of a blighted village center town-owned property, and *TRACK, Three Rivers Arts, Community Knowledge*, an Adams Arts funded project incorporating the arts as a revitalization catalyst, the Ware small business resiliency initiative. CITC has been key to acquiring the matching funds required for this successful program. These types of projects ameliorate potential tax burdens, improve the quality of life for town residents, and mitigate risk and/or foster economic development that will benefit the towns.

GOAL 5, Bridging the Transportation Gap: QVDCDC has been working with partners across the region to identify and implement solutions to a major systemic barrier to economic growth to our region: the transportation gap. Work has been done with the regional planning commissions and regional transit authorities as well as with local partners and residents on this problem. Our mission to assist LMI residents and business owners with job training and business assistance to promote economic development and to assist the region to reach economic self-sufficiency prompted QVDCDC to devote resources to collaborative solutions to bridge the transportation gap across service areas and across counties. CITC donations have made this initiative possible and resulted in *The Quaboag Connector*, a van service that provides transport to work and employment related activities that has expanded to serve residents of 10 communities. This service is a partnership with the Town of Ware and QVDCDC.

How LMI households and other constituencies will benefit from achieving goals: Benefits will extend from the individual level to the regional level, affecting all sectors and reflecting our focus on LMI households. In particular, viable public transportation options (public and private) will allow residents to travel for work and education. Building financial capability and assets will allow residents to acquire the resources to attend college or workforce training, which will

improve their chances for employment. With a better-trained workforce with reliable transportation, small businesses will be more stable and will create more jobs – all of which undergird each goal we are proposing.

How communities and our region will benefit from achieving goals: Increasing personal resources creates opportunities for individuals to increase their household income. Increasing personal resources related to transportation and education will raise the education levels of the region. A stronger small business community has the multiplier effect of keeping dollars within the region, thereby increasing commerce, which leads to additional entrepreneurial activity and more jobs. This results in reduced unemployment and underemployment.

“Research supports the assertion that improved transportation increases access to jobs and educational opportunities, supports community and economic development and improves quality of life.” (Source: smartgrowthamerica.org)

Section 4: Activities to be undertaken

GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Years 1-3: We will continue to provide loans to businesses that cannot access equivalent financing as well as provide individual consultation in the areas of accounting, bookkeeping, financial management, sales and marketing, general management and business planning. In response to survey results we are building more online friendly loan documents. We will continue to offer group training in business skills areas such as the use of QuickBooks, basic bookkeeping and computer skills. We will offer business-planning classes with subsidies for small business owners from LMI households.

Measurements and Benchmarks will be used throughout.

GOAL 2: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Years 1-3: We will continue to utilize *E2E, Education to Employment, the Quaboag Region Workforce Training and Community College Center* with our many community partners and stakeholders. We will continue to provide Workforce Express training, and training to small business owners on business related software and skills.

Measurements and Benchmarks will be used throughout

Note: All goals from the 2020 CIP were achieved or exceeded including obtaining the E2E site, increasing training capacity and individuals trained, and establishing new community partnerships.

GOAL 3: FINANCIAL SKILLS-BUILDING & ASSET DEVELOPMENT

Years 1–3: We will continue to build and expand the *Harrison and Diane Quirk Financial Fitness Club* commensurate with resources and opportunities.

Measurements and Benchmarks will be used throughout.

Note: All goals from the 2020 CIP were achieved or exceeded.

GOAL 4: MUNICIPALITIES

Years 1-3: We will continue to assist municipalities in our region by engaging in consultations or studies to address barriers to improved economic conditions such as revitalization, program development assistance, and transportation as opportunities and resources permit.

Measurements and Benchmarks will be used throughout.

Note: Goals from the 2020 CIP were achieved or exceeded.

GOAL 5: BRIDGING THE TRANSPORTATION GAP

Years 1-3: We will continue to improve service efficiency and increase ridership of the *Quaboag Connector* and other solutions to this problem. We will continue work with UMass Chan Medical students at Baystate to educate future health care professionals on the effect that lack of access to transportation has on health outcomes.

Measurements and Benchmarks will be used throughout.

Note: Goals from the 2020 CIP were achieved or exceeded.

Expected Impacts of Activities on Goals and Constituencies Served

1. Small and Microenterprise business assistance: jobs are created and retained through a) an increase in new businesses started, b) existing businesses become stronger through increased sales, increased net income, increased assets and the like, c) ancillary business opportunities develop in response to stronger economic conditions as evidenced by type and nature of business and customer base.
2. Workforce Development: initiatives will bring skills training and education to the region. This will help individuals obtain employment or a better job or they might use their new skills to enhance their existing business or start a new business. Small businesses will have a better-educated and skilled labor pool from which to draw employees.
3. Participation in financial capability building and asset development will assist individuals to meet their business, education or transportation needs, leading them to financial independence and stability
4. Municipal Assistance: towns are better able to respond to situations that affect their citizenry but are otherwise outside their scope.
5. We know that the work on transportation is resulting in multiple solutions in the region that include the *Quaboag Connector*, other public and private transportation options, and ride-sharing programs. These solutions will help LMI resident access training and/or jobs and will make it easier for employers to find employees with reliable transportation.

Section 5: HOW SUCCESS WILL BE MEASURED +/-OR EVALUATED

QVCDC uses an inclusive data driven, process improvement model. Stakeholders are identified and will participate throughout the Plan to ensure that relevant parties are at the table to help select outcomes and their measurements. Experience has shown us that sharing the data with stakeholders with a clear objective in mind (setting priorities or considering promising options or identifying barriers) results most often in identifying workable solutions to

sometimes-thorny problems. We maintain fidelity to the principles of inclusion, the use of data in discussion and decision-making and to continuous process improvement.

We will work with participants to:

1. Engage various stakeholders (LMI individuals, businesses, education providers, transportation providers, banks) regarding the plan's goals,
2. Collect data and research best practices regarding the achievement of the Plan's goals,
3. Set priorities and identify possible solutions,
4. Develop pilot solutions to problems the Plan will address (with Metrics), test, evaluate and report to participants,
5. Make changes, test again and analyze results with participants,
6. Formalize successful models and prepare for implementation
7. Continue to involve participants in monitoring and on-going review of the models' performance always with an eye to improvements as they evolve.

Tools and Methodologies

1. Use intake form to gather initial information and status of customer/client, update as needed to reflect changing demands for data
2. Use existing customized database and loan software to record intake and activity over time, update as needed to reflect changing demands for data
3. Develop alternative methods of data collection and recording in response to changing demands for data
4. Collect town-wide and regional statistics (where possible) to document overall economic conditions.

Evaluation Process and Role of Participants:

Businesses and Individuals:

1. At intake use intake form to collect as much information as possible, recognizing that inquirers have differing levels of interest in our programs and services. Always attempt to identify income status at intake.
2. Expand second tier intake process to include specific data relevant to the appropriate program. For loan applicants, complete a loan profile intake; for computer training, complete a loan/workforce student profile; for asset building applicants, complete an asset development profile.
3. Require that all program participants understand and agree (in advance) to periodic reporting over the life of the program as a condition of assistance. Report on outcomes as requested by Board members or funders as necessary to "tell our story".
4. Continue to adapt our website or other online mechanisms so that program participants can respond to requests for data online. Provide computer training, if necessary, to facilitate this process. Make the process as easy as possible to get high-level participation.
5. Use follow-up measures as necessary, including phone calls, correspondence and follow-up surveys via email, and mail.

Municipalities: Board(s) assess outcome of involvement with town, including feedback from QVBAC town representative or other officials. Determine if QVCDC has the capacity to replicate activity in other communities identifying necessary resources or funders.

Region: assess town-wide and regional statistics and compare to historical numbers to determine employment trends.

Section 6: Collaborative efforts to support implementation

1. We will continue to work with **banks**, especially our community banks, who participate on the QVBAC Loan Committee and refer businesses to our programs and services. Our banks have been major contributors of volunteer time and expertise on our Boards and Board Committees, have donated furniture, equipment, and improved space for E2E, and made generous financial contributions to QVCDC. A Loan Pool Line of Credit for \$330,000 is established with 4 community banks. The local banks have been a major source of CITC donations. We have also received donations for programs that were initiated with CITC funding from large super regional banks that did not request CITC's for their donations.
2. We will continue to work with **public and private funders**, including expanded outreach to foundations, to understand their goals in making grants, seek grants that correspond to our mission, work cooperatively to design intake and data collection systems for reporting on outcomes, submit reports in a timely fashion, collaborate on promotion and/or publication of outcomes, and to make eligible contributions to secure Community Investment Tax Credits. We have a successful record of receiving repeat grant funding from many state- sponsored agencies including: Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Commonwealth Corporation, the Massachusetts Tech Collaborative, and CDBG funding. Our federal funding sources have included multiple grants and loan fund support from the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, and USDA RMAP and RBEG programs as well as the National Center for Mobility Management and Smart Growth America
3. We will continue to maintain and expand our cadre of professional **consultants** available to provide specific assistance to our clients when requested. We ensure that our consultants meet standards on credentialing (when relevant), and references, including satisfactory references from clients.
4. We will continue to maintain and expand our **collaboration** with area and regional nonprofits and **municipalities** in the delivery of programs and services including Behavioral Health Network, Ware Adult Learning Center, Palmer Historical and Cultural Center, Workshop 13, Baystate Health Systems, local Senior Centers, and the Planning/Community Development Offices in Spencer, Ware, Warren, Palmer, Belchertown and Monson, the Regional Transportation Authorities, Department of Transportation, the Regional Planning Commissions, and the Regional Employment Boards. Additionally, we propose:
 - a) Program co-sponsorships and promotions (e.g. Chambers of Commerce and libraries)
 - b) Hold meeting and provide trainings at other nonprofits (e.g. Hitchcock Academy)

- c) Work collaboratively with regional non-profits on wider regional strategies (Central Mass and Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commissions, Central Mass Grown, Worcester and Pioneer Valley Transit Authorities, Regional Employment Boards and others to continue to address employment, training and transportation issues.)
 - d) Participate in networks of nonprofits and in community meetings to inform us of community and LMI person' needs (e.g. Quaboag Hills Community Coalition, and to provide resources (e.g. MIDAS Collaborative for asset building)
 - e) We have and will continue to expand collaborations to deliver specific services that are outside our intended scope such as staff training, asset development education and servicing, housing-related counseling, financial capability training and workforce development services.
 - f) We will continue to work closely with other CDC's, particularly through MACDC's working groups, to ensure consistency of program standards and delivery.
 - g) With the help of MACDC, we will work with Mass Bay United Way.
5. **Employers:** as we continue to expand our collaborations on Workforce Development, with *E2E* as the focus, we will engage with additional area employers, Holyoke Community (and potentially the other community colleges,) and the Regional Employment Boards to better understand employers' needs, training opportunities and to identify possibilities for future job placement. We will continue to expand our relationships with businesses and encourage them to secure Community Investment Tax Credits.

Our overall financing strategy is to continue to apply for grants and bid on contracts that will help us further our mission, continue to develop and expand foundation support for our programs, strengthen our donor funding with targeted campaigns leveraging the CITC, and to continue our operations in a manner that is respectful of the values of our stakeholders.

Section 7: Integration of activities/consistency with community strategy & vision

Our historic approach to community economic development has been focused on assisting citizens, especially LMI citizens, to obtain a job or a better job. In some cases, this is direct as in making a loan to a job-creating small business. In some cases, it is indirect, as with **workforce training** that might lead the participant to a new or better job and with **financial capability training and asset development**, whereby the client's goal could be to learn to make wise financial decisions and be able to obtain an education that would ultimately lead to a living-wage job. As has been the case historically, one individual may participate in many activities. For instance, a prospective loan client with some credit issues might participate in the Financial Fitness Club, to acquire new skills, improve her credit score, and save for a business asset, while also taking a business-planning course. That same client might then participate in the Technical Assistance program to have an attorney help review a lease or contract for the business, and take a QuickBooks class. Then, the client would be prepared to apply for and obtain a small business loan. As the business grows the employees of the business could obtain business software training from QVCDC. While the asset-building program has proved to be a logical

addition to our portfolio of services and is consistent with our historic efforts to provide financial literacy. It expands upon that objective by offering opportunities to acquire business assets, education and even transportation needed for a job or education. Resolving **transportation** issues will aid that effort significantly. In other words, **this initiative augments all of our traditional strategies and is consistent with our strategy of reducing unemployment and underemployment in the region.** In the case of **municipal** assistance, a project has the potential to address residents' social and environmental needs over a longer time frame.

There are no other plans that address the Quaboag Region as a whole. In their absence, we note that our plan is consistent with DHCD's strategic plan for "accelerated job creation" wherein the Department states that it will "create an environment that encourages sustainable business growth and job creation where MA residents can find steady employment at good wages and MA employers can find qualified employees at competitive wages".

Section 8: Financing Strategy

QV CDC had a long track record of successful fundraising, but the opportunity provided by the CITC's has been the critical factor in a major increase in donations. It has allowed QV CDC to stabilize its core programs across grant funding cycles, and expand services and programs that benefit LMI residents. Board and QV CDC members are regular individual donors. Foundation and healthcare related donations have increased in both number and dollars.

Our traditional funding streams had been heavily weighted toward grant funding from state and federal sources, a small amount of unrestricted income earned from our programs, and donations raised either for specific projects or to meet our operating expenses. QV CDC has enjoyed a good relationship with our grant funders, resulting in invitations to apply for subsequent grants and repeat grant funding. We currently have funding in place from Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation, The Massachusetts Division of Banks, CDBG through the Towns of Palmer and Ware, USDA RMAP, CDFI, Baystate Wing Hospital, the Community Foundation of Western Mass, and The Health Foundation of Central Mass. An additional CDFI application has been submitted for loan program funding for targeted investment areas heavily impacted by Covid-19. We will continue to research and apply for grants that support our Community Investment Plan activities.

Our community banks have been generous donors and financiers of a portion of our loan capital, and have provided funding and support for the Financial Fitness Club, E2E, Senior Outreach, and the Quaboag Connector. They have been true partners in fostering economic development in our region. Our Board members and strong community volunteers have been advising and assisting staff in our robust fundraising activities. Donations have increased from \$76,323 in FY 2013 to \$ 487,545 in FY22.

Our strategies for raising CITC donations have included dedicating tax credits to new initiatives such as **E2E, TRACK, and the Quaboag Connector**, outreach to accountants and financial advisors, and increasing public awareness of the programs and the donations that support

them. A grant from the Community Foundation of Western Mass is providing coaching and software from *Network for Good* to improve our messaging and outreach to current and prospective donors. We find that as we add programs, our donor base is growing. Our CITC donation fundraising strategy includes: continuing to grow our relationships with foundations, a stronger partnership with the United Way of Mass Bay, and continuing outreach to our community banking partners.

The fundraising opportunity provided by CITC has and will continue to leverage additional funding from many grant sources that prefer to see community dollars augmenting their investment in a project. The funds raised will be used to support programs that will increase our capacity to serve our community, sustain valuable existing programs, leverage additional funding, and fully develop our new programs.

Section 9: History, Track Record and Sustainable Development

Assistance to small businesses and microenterprises:

1. Loans: the QVBAC has disbursed over 4.6M to small businesses and microenterprises in the region that were unable to access equivalent private financing. The QVBAC has obtained loan capital from USDA, CDFI, MGCC, and CDBG as well as a loan pool line of credit from local community banks. Loan applicants are offered technical assistance based on need to strengthen their business. Target markets include LMI small business owners and businesses located in the distressed downtown Ware and the Palmer village of Three Rivers neighborhoods.
2. Technical Assistance/Business Development Services: In the past three years individual consultation in the areas of accounting, bookkeeping, financial management, sales and marketing, general management and business planning has been provided to 153 businesses. During this time 13 new businesses were started, 42 jobs created, and 262 jobs preserved.
3. Workforce Training: In response to the Covid-19 pandemic QVCDC reconfigured many of the business software classes from in- person to online training. Other classes such as Emergency Medical Technician and Manufacturing were conducted in person. In the past three years training in business skills areas including the use of QuickBooks, other business-related computer software, business planning and basic bookkeeping, manufacturing, EMT and ServSafe have been provided to 188 participants.
4. Course evaluations and post-assistance surveys are collected from individuals and businesses served to improve our practices.

Assistance to Individuals by providing programs to increase personal assets: Past practice included working with students from Ware Adult Learning Center (WALC), a HiSet/Career Development nonprofit located in our building, as well as with individuals from the community. We provided both individualized classroom training and 1-to-1 coaching in job readiness skills, computer literacy and software.

1. The Quirk Financial Fitness Club, a 12-month program including group training, 1-to-1 financial coaching, and a matched savings account (IDA) was launched in 2014. Over the past three years additional staff training and certifications in housing and foreclosure

counseling were achieved. A third cohort of the program was completed this fall and the next group has started. Participants in the program report consistently positive results including improved credit scores, improved financial skills and increased confidence in managing money. Savings goals achieved included: reliable used cars, a necessary or energy saving home improvement, first and last months' rent and security deposit for a formerly homeless veteran and his daughter, and a business asset for a new small business owner.

Assistance to Municipalities to address barriers to improved economic conditions:

Past practices have included utilizing staff where appropriate and bringing in consultants for specialized expertise when required. Past projects include: a feasibility study and subsequent collaborative grant to develop a blighted town-owned mixed-use property in the center of Three Rivers (a village of Palmer), *TRACK*, a Three Rivers arts-related revitalization project, development of a Senior Outreach program for the Town of Hardwick, participation in Mass in Motion in Palmer, and a Healthy Hampshire project to increase access to healthy food. In response to Covid-19 we assisted the Towns of Palmer, Southbridge and the planning commissions by providing technical assistance for CDBG funded Microenterprise grants in twelve towns., and expanded the Senior outreach program to include the towns of Ware, Warren, Belchertown and Hardwick. The *Quaboag Connector*, a regional transportation project partnership with the Town of Ware provided its 50,000th ride this fall. QVCDC leads the Synergy Initiative project that is investing Two Million dollars to develop a sustainable model for rural transportation. Additional projects include partnerships with the Town of Ware on developing a Quaboag Region Community Health Improvement Plan, the regional Rural Vaccine and Health Equity Initiative, and a new program to engage youth in improving education and employment outcomes in the region.

Assistance to the region by providing a unique cluster of programs and services from within the region:

As the only place-based provider of services focused on improving the economic lives of LMI small business owners and residents in our region, we are singularly positioned to directly observe and hear about the needs and problems faced by our constituencies. We are able to devote our full attention to providing an integrated array of resources and solutions. As a result of increased capacity afforded by CITC's, projects addressing the challenges of workforce development, financial capability and asset building, and meeting regional transportation needs have been launched and will continue to be developed.

Sustainable Development Principles

1. *Concentrate Development and Mix Uses:* QVCDC's efforts align closely with this Principle, particularly in its language to "encourage remediation and reuse of existing sites, structures and infrastructure", which we have done with local municipalities with work on abandoned buildings, and commercial or mixed-use development. We recently completed a project in downtown Ware bringing three formerly empty storefronts up to code and providing space for a pottery studio and art gallery.
2. *Advance Equity:* Our participation in the CDBG and CDFI planning process over the years has allowed us to keep the economic interests of the region's small businesses and its low- and middle-income residents as our focus.

3. *Make Efficient Decisions:* We are not involved in permitting or regulatory promulgation or compliance determinations.
4. *Protect Land and Ecosystems:* The relevant application of this Principle is to our work on brownfields and abandoned buildings.
5. *Use Natural Resources Wisely:* All QVBAC loans are scrutinized for the effects of that financing on the environment: mitigation measures are taken when necessary.
6. *Expand Housing Opportunities:* We do not currently (nor have we historically) been involved in housing, but there is a significant need in the region so QVCDC may address housing in the future.
7. *Provide transportation choice:* In our mostly rural region this is a major problem. QVCDC has taken a leadership role in improving transportation options in the region with the *Quaboag Connector*. Likewise, building financial capability and asset development provides an opportunity for LMI residents and small business owners to acquire reliable transportation and/or use expanded public transportation. QVCDC has partnered with the PURCH program of University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School at Baystate to ensure medical professionals are educated on transportation as a determinant of health and are better prepared to advocate for rural transportation.
8. *Increase Jobs and Business Opportunities:* This organization has worked actively since 1995 to encourage such economic development in our region. We are deeply invested in providing three key supports: training individuals to be able to meet employers' workforce needs, providing business development services and expertise in small business operations, finances and related business concerns, and providing loans to viable small businesses to help them start, stabilize, grow, and provide jobs for local people.
9. *Promote Clean Energy:* Our interest in environmental sustainability and clean energy go hand-in-hand with our economic development initiatives. The region's growing adoption of solar and wind power generation will reduce our reliance on fossil fuels while presenting increasing opportunities for LMI persons to get green jobs.
10. *Plan Regionally:* We interact with the Pioneer Valley and Central Mass Regional Planning Commission on their planning activities. We work with three local chambers of Commerce to foster regional plans and business activities. We work with a variety of regional nonprofit service providers on access to education, jobs and transportation issues facing their clients.