

# Howard Project Awarded \$450,000

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HOWARD - The federal government has awarded partial funding for construction of the Rural Learning Center near Howard, a structure envisioned as a place for rural people to gather, learn and re-energize.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has granted \$450,000 to the project, with the possibility for another \$450,000 next year. The new building will occupy land donated by a Howard family. RLC Executive Director Jim Beddow said the specific building plan is still a work in progress.

He does not yet know how much the project will cost. Currently, Beddow operates the RLC out of an office in Howard. He shares staff members with the Miner County Community Revitalization office.

Beddow said he wants the RLC to be a campus that melts into the rural landscape. Initial plans include buildings powered from natural sources like the wind, sun and corn. Landscaping will include tall prairie grasses.

"We want to build a compelling place where rural leaders will want to come to and benefit from," Beddow said.

The RLC will eventually be a self-supporting entity. Part of the ongoing costs will be paid by renters

organizations that pay for office space at the Center. Other costs will be paid by the rural communities, groups and individuals who use the space.

Rural leaders will be encouraged to use the Center as a sort of consulting firm to develop

strategies for revitalizing rural communities. Beddow already is working with several communities on four pilot projects that deal with housing, entrepreneurship, county-wide strategic planning, and collaborations between school, county and city officials.

The building plans include lodging and hospitality rooms for visitors and users of the center, and a conference center for meetings and large events.

Miner County Community Revitalization played a key role in the startup of the project, because many outsiders wanted to duplicate MCCR's work in their own counties.

"RLC is a vehicle to work with many of the communities who showed up at MCCR and asked, 'What are you doing here?'" Beddow said. "It's partially in response to that need."

Beddow is a former president of Dakota Wesleyan University and gubernatorial candidate. He agreed to head up the RLC a little more than a year ago, and said the planning and building of the new facility will probably take several years.