



ANNUAL REPORT

2020

As we conclude a historic year shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic, Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC) has worked diligently to serve our nine-county region in an unprecedented time. The Lake Crystal Strategic Economic Development Plan and Kiester Action Plan reflect RNDC's commitment to form robust strategies that revitalize small towns.

In order to maximize economic potential, we completed a comprehensive Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan to invest in infrastructure, so it is easier for youth to attend school. In this Fiscal Year 2020 Report, you will find examples of our team's efforts to establish partnerships with diverse stakeholders to advance long-lasting progress across the region.

We were also awarded the 6th consecutive Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for our innovative approach to stimulate critical medical device manufacturing activities in South Central Minnesota.

RNDC was also granted the opportunity to feature the region's clean energy and climate change initiatives through the Minnesota Department of Commerce State Energy Office's Clean Energy Community Education Grant Program as well as a Clean Energy Tour through the University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment exchange program with Germany.

The team strives to develop new projects and programs, while forming meaningful partnerships to improve the lives of all residents in our nine-county region. Thank you for a great 2020, and I am eager to see the partnerships and new opportunities that 2021 brings.

Sincerely,



Nicole Griensewic
Executive Director





This unpredictable year has made me even more humbled to serve as RNDC's chair, witnessing this organization's dedication in serving our nine-county region during a global pandemic. From envisioning economic development plans that revamp small towns like Lake Crystal and Kiester, to providing immediate assistance for small businesses hit hardest from COVID-19, RNDC truly is a champion for South Central Minnesota. RNDC has worked on projects spanning from rural equity, clean energy, and safer infrastructure. This annual report features interesting projects that were completed this past fiscal year. The continued success of this programming is a result of the determination and resiliency of RNDC staff who adhere to the needs of our communities across Southern Minnesota, and provide them with supportive resources to flourish in this tough time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steve Rohlfling".

Steve Rohlfling
Chair

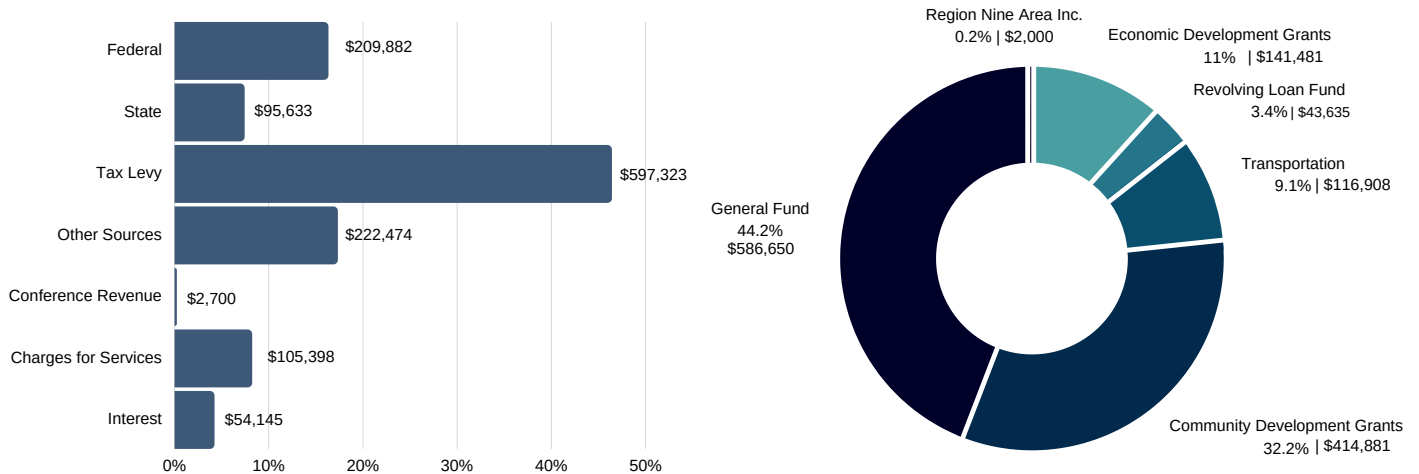


FINANCE REPORT

ACTUAL FY20 REVENUES

TOTAL REVENUES

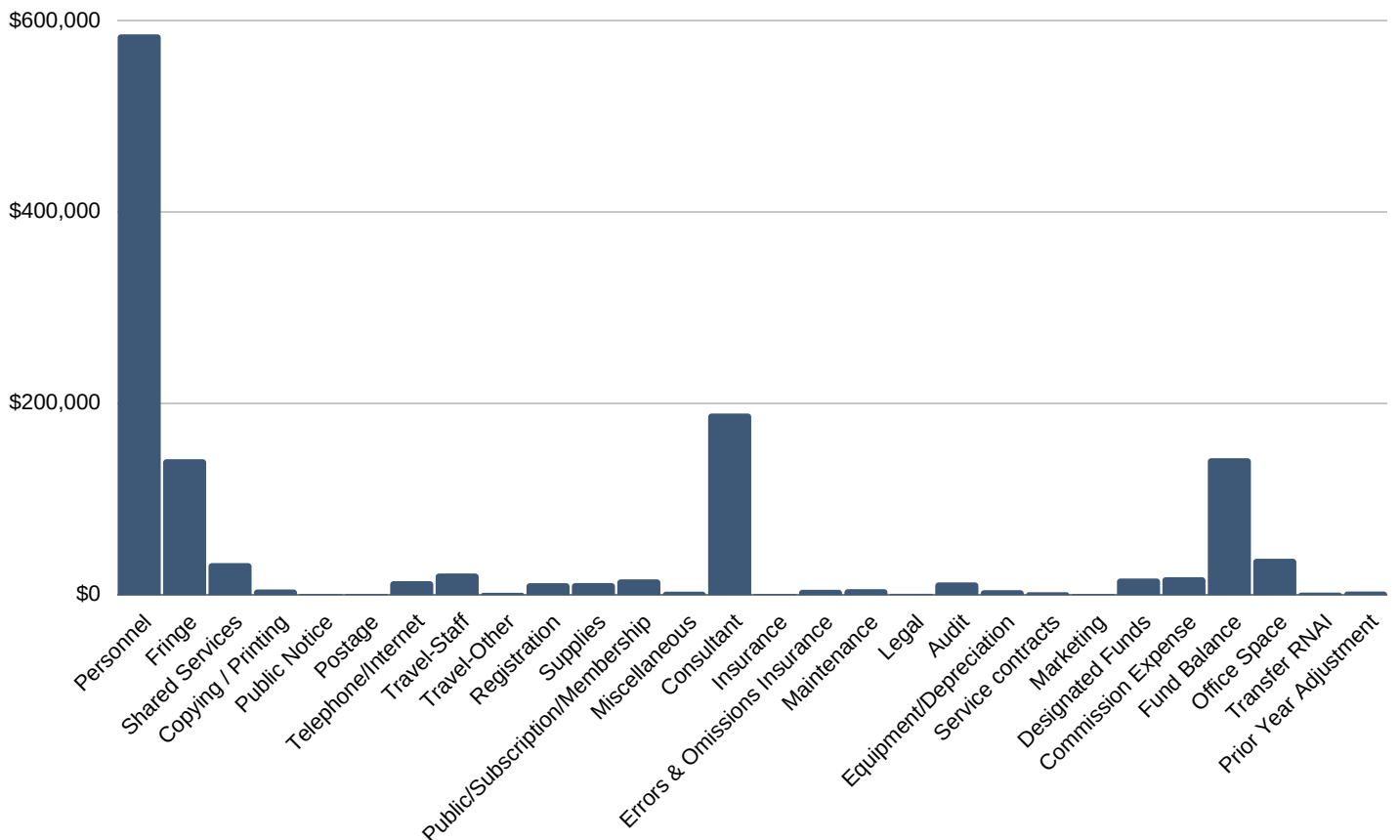
\$1,287,555



ACTUAL FY20 EXPENDITURES

TOTAL EXPENDITURES

\$1,287,555



REVOLVING LOAN FUND

RNDC administers a Revolving Loan Fund to assist businesses in the nine-county region. The primary goal is to help existing businesses expand and new businesses get their start. In this endeavor, there is also an intention to strengthen the regional economies through the job growth provided by these expansions and start-ups.

The last four months of FY20 saw COVID-19, and its associated restrictions, challenge the goals of RNDC's lending program. More importantly, it challenged and continues to challenge the loan clients RNDC works to support, and the businesses that are their livelihoods. Because these clients and businesses needed immediate financial support, the RNDC Loan Committee immediately jumped into action and provided deferments to any client that requested it. RNDC has made a commitment to continue with this assistance into FY21 in order to help these businesses succeed.

RNDC would also like to acknowledge the courage and strength shown by the small businesses in the region, whether an RNDC loan client or not. The pandemic has caused great hardship and you continue to recover and be resilient. **You are appreciated!**



INNOVATION



Region Nine has received a 2019 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact and Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for MedTech Connect.

MedTech Connect was motivated by the need to develop a conceptual framework that inventories and supports medical manufacturing activities in South Central Minnesota. The plan examines how well manufacturing and related industries leverage their geographic proximity to the medical manufacturing hub in the Twin Cities and innovations at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. Results from this report indicate that South Central Minnesota is poised for growth in the medical manufacturing sector and has led to RNDC applying and being awarded a grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to conduct a feasibility study for a Manufacturing Resource Center in Waseca, MN.

NADO is a Washington, DC-based membership association of regional development organizations that promote programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies. The association's Impact Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and their partners for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's regions and local communities.

Award-winning projects were honored during NADO's 2019 Annual Training Conference, held October 19-22 in Reno, NV. The 2019 class of award recipients consists of 100 projects from 66 organizations spanning 24 states.

AMERICAS COMPETITIVENESS EXCHANGE

The Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACE) was created in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Department of State and the Organization of American States (OAS) to showcase first-hand successful examples of entrepreneurship, innovation, strategic investments and public-private partnerships from a specific region/country within the Western Hemisphere that contribute to economic development at the local, regional, and national levels. ACE has become a flagship hemispheric initiative for the promotion of better innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems in the Americas. It is one of the main initiatives of the Inter-American Competitiveness Network (RIAC), in which the OAS serves as Technical Secretariat. ACE activities are selected to further advance commerce, trade and investment between participating economies, accelerate business opportunities, and promote collaboration among stakeholders. Executive Director Nicole Griensewic is serving as an ambassador for the program.

As an ambassador for the ACE program, Griensewic has been chosen to represent the Economic Development Districts in the U.S. as well as rural agricultural communities, which gives South Central Minnesota a unique opportunity to foster relationships with other parts of the Americas and the rest of the world. This global exchange allows Region Nine to showcase the innovative work that is taking place regionally and provide examples of technical assistance projects that the organization offers. The goal is to decrease obstacles that stand in the way of global trade and investments and to make the world a little smaller by connecting the right people. The ACE program has already allowed the region to share Region Nine's MedTech Connect work with foreign delegates, diplomats, and governments. Region Nine is in a unique position to have ongoing conversations with local manufacturers and other industries, learn about their challenges, analyze the global markets, and make recommendations that can reduce some of these barriers.



The 12th ACE (ACE 12) took place in Santiago de Chile, Chile, from October 6, 2019 to October 10, 2019. ACE 12 showcased initiatives that emerged in Chile on digital transformation to increase productivity, modernization, and growth of national industry. The program familiarized participants with investment and export opportunities in Chile and provided opportunities to engage with top local actors of the innovation ecosystem that are leading the digital transformation in Chile.



SOUTHERN MINNESOTA EQUITY SUMMIT

Region Nine, in partnership with University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality (UMNECCV) and Greater Mankato Diversity Council (GMDC), co-hosted the Southern Minnesota Equity Summit geared toward rural communities and community leaders in southern Minnesota.

The summit convened regional leaders as a catalyst for learning, networking, and innovation to promote welcoming and equitable communities on November 1, 2019, at the Saint Peter High School. Keynotes speakers included Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan and Jane Leonard, President of Growth and Justice. Breakout sessions covered strategies and tools for use in the sectors of business & industry, education, government, and community groups & nonprofits.



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CLEAN ENERGY TOUR

Guido Wallraven, technical director for the City of Saerbeck in Germany's climate-smart municipality project since 2009, visited southern Minnesota on March 10, 2020, as part of a Clean Energy Tour hosted by Region Nine. The Clean Energy Tour was part of an exchange program through the University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment that partners cities in Germany and Minnesota to try to better identify avenues of sustainability and use of renewable energy.

The day started in Le Sueur at Hometown Bioenergy with a site tour of the 8MW biomass facility before heading to Waseca for a discussion on how the City of Saerbeck has excelled in renewable energy on a community level as well as opportunities where Minnesota can do the same. The tour ended with a site tour at Midwest Extractions and the actions they are taking at local, state, and federal levels to create regulations that will benefit the hemp industry.



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CLEAN ENERGY COMMUNITIES

The Minnesota Department of Commerce State Energy Office has developed the Clean Energy Community Education Grant Program to promote clean energy education efforts, to be featured at the State Fair. On September 2, 2020 RNDC showcased two communities, School Sisters of Notre Dame located in Mankato, Minnesota and Hometown Bioenergy from Minnesota Municipal Power Agency located in Le Sueur, Minnesota as part of the program located in the Eco Experience building.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame is a 100 percent clean energy nursing home and residence. The Catholic Religious order owns one solar array and has purchased shares in two other cooperative projects. Taken together, the solar panels power a nursing home and mother house, over a total of 660,000 square feet of building space across 146 acres. Additionally, they generate revenue by selling some electricity back to supplier Xcel Energy. The School Sisters of Notre Dame are carbon negative on electricity and have not paid a bill in more than a decade.

Hometown Bioenergy from Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, just north of the City of Le Sueur, is the nation's largest anaerobic digester, which uses bacterial decomposition to convert agricultural byproducts (i.e., corn silage, chicken droppings) into methane. The clean-burning natural gas is then used to generate electricity. The plant pumps out enough energy to power more than 5,000 homes.

This program is intended to support participation in an educational initiative that showcases the use of energy efficiency and renewable energy, addresses climate change issues, and empowers, inspires, and motivates a new generation of energy leaders of all ages and backgrounds in communities in Minnesota.



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LAKE CRYSTAL STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Lake Crystal Strategic Economic Development Plan is the result of an initiative between RNDC and the City of Lake Crystal and creates a comprehensive picture of Lake Crystal's economy, position, and reputation within the region. The plan incorporates public engagement and feedback that allowed RNDC to verify findings, test assumptions, and uncover additional challenges and opportunities that the city may face.

Input came from more than 50 interviews with business owners and city officials, a public survey with 211 respondents, and a public open house attended by about 30 residents. Findings suggest that investments in affordable, multifamily housing and public infrastructure, particularly along State Highway 60 and an industrial park, stand to offer the highest returns on investment. Five specific action steps were identified for the city to consider pursuing:

1. Develop a marketing campaign
2. Develop/redevelop underutilized sites, including downtown
3. Provide relocation incentives for businesses
4. Develop industrial park near Highway 60
5. Establish a manufacturing-related business cluster

The plan will act as a guide and tool to aid Lake Crystal as they look to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities to create a more resilient community. A final public meeting was held on November 6, 2019 to present the plan to residents and discuss the future of Lake Crystal.





SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) helps children walk and bike to school more often through infrastructure improvements, education, and promotional activities. SRTS is more than just a program, it is a comprehensive strategy to instill life-long habits that support physical activity and health. Walking and biking to school helps families stay active and healthy, and kids arrive focused and ready to learn.

RNDC completed a comprehensive SRTS plans in June 2020 for seven Mankato public schools (Franklin, Jefferson, Kennedy, Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, and Washington Elementary Schools and Prairie Winds Middle School). The goals for the plans were to help children in these two communities remain active in safe environments as they make their way to and from school and create healthier communities for generations to come.



RNDC COMMISSIONERS

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Mike Laven
Lyle Femrite
Colleen Landkamer
Jim Grabowska

BROWN COUNTY

Scott Windschitl
Gary Richter
Robert Goblirsch
Charles Schmitz

FARIBAULT COUNTY

Tom Loveall
Steve Holmseth
Terri Douglas

LE SUEUR COUNTY

Richard Peterson
Steve Rohlfing
Chuck Nickolay

MARTIN COUNTY

Elliot Belgard
Ruth Cyphers
Phil Schafer
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NICOLLET COUNTY

Marie Dranttel
Pam Rodewald
Jim Whitlock
Chuck Zieman

SIBLEY COUNTY

Doug Munsch
Jim Swanson
John Pioske

WASECA COUNTY

Roy Srp
Blair Nelson
Laurel Remund

WATONWAN COUNTY

Ray Gustafson
Gary Sturm
Steven Cooling
Mike Pfeil

PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS

Chris Dalton
Chera Sevcik
Ayan Omar
Maya Englehorn
Connor LaPointe

Striving to promote the development of the region through intergovernmental cooperation, community and human development, long-range planning, and technical assistance.

RNDC STAFF



Nicole Griensewic
Executive Director



Heather Bartelt
Executive Assistant



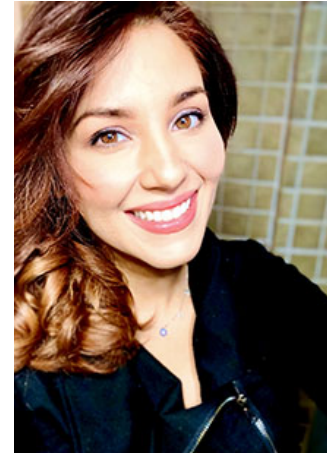
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Communications Specialist



Linda Wallace
Senior Financial Accountant
Revolving Loan Fund Assistant



Lu Vanderwerf
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