



Board Meeting

Wednesday, August 9, 2023 at 4:30 p.m.



RNDC | 3 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 310 Mankato, MN

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

August 9, 2023 at 4:30 p.m. | Region Nine Development Commission

AGENDA

	<u>Time</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Action</u>
I. Call to Order	4:30		
II. Roll Call – <i>Secretary Branstad</i>			
III. Approval of Agenda		1	Action
IV. Approval of June 7, 2023 Minutes		2	Action
V. Treasurer's Report – <i>Treasurer Dranttel</i>	4:40	8	Action
VI. Finance Director's Report – <i>Ky Battern</i>	4:45	11	
VII. Chair's Report – <i>Chair Laven</i>	4:55		
A. DRAFT Code of Conduct Review		12	
B. Board Portal Review – <i>Nate George</i>		14	
VIII. Executive Director's Report – <i>Nicole Griensewic</i>	5:20	16	
A. Local Foods Presentation – <i>Sabri Fair</i>			
B. NADO Recap			
C. Staffing Updates			
D. Out Of State Travel Request – Courtney Wright		32	Action
IX. Other Business	5:55		
A. Commissioner Updates			
B. Meeting Evaluation		Handout	
X. Adjournment	6:00		Action

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Laven called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. at RNDC in Mankato, MN

Chair Laven expressed his condolences to Blair Nelson's family. A moment of silence was held in Nelson's memory.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrea Boettger, Jim Branstad, Marie Dranttel, Lyle Femrite, Tom Loveall, Steve Rohlfig, Phil Schafer

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Christian Lilienthal, Blair Nelson

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Nicole Griensewic, Ky Battern, Heather Bartelt

There was a quorum.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Griensewic requested that the Finance Director's report be moved to before the Treasurer's Report

Loveall moved to approve the revised agenda. Rohlfig seconded. Motion carried.

IV. APPROVAL OF MAY 10, 2023 MINUTES

Schafer moved to approve the May 10, 2023 minutes as presented, Branstad seconded. Motion carried.

V. TREASURER'S REPORT

Dranttel presented the Treasurer's Report

Rohlfig moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Femrite seconded. Motion carried.

VI. FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Battern shared that he has requested to move the RNDC Audit timeline with Abdo. Battern noted that it has been confirmed with Abdo that the goal for the audit is to be completed by August/September 2023. Battern shared this will alleviate Abdo's busy schedule and prevent RNDC from getting caught up in the June 30 year ends.

Battern noted that within the Budget Review discussion there is a line item for a new RNDC vehicle as the current one has high mileage. Discussion followed.

Battern shared he has completed the framework and the treasurer reports will have a new look in the upcoming board & commission packets.

Battern noted that the RLF Committee agreed to fund The Picklebarn and is on track to close at the end of June.

Battern shared that he is currently in the process of completing budget activities. Once this task is completed, he plans to visit more banks in the region to discuss the RLF Program.

Battern shared that RNDC will sponsor a hole at the upcoming SBDC Golf Event on June 27 in St. James in hopes to get more visibility of the RLF Program.

Battern noted there are funds available to loan out and Battern followed up sharing there are several loan projects moving forward.

VII. BUDGET REVIEW & RECOMMENDATION

Battern shared documents showing the current budget outlook and asked the board if there were questions. Battern then presented the FY24 Proposed Budget. Discussion followed.

Rohlfing moved to accept and recommend the FY24 Proposed Budget to the Full Commission. Schafer seconded. Motion carried.

Battern shared that the Budget & Personnel Committee recommended a 0% levy increase.

Battern shared that a significant funding change for FY24 would involve the completion of several larger grants, and the majority of RNDC funding will shift towards levy dollars vs. grant funds.

Battern presented a document which broke down the different dollar amounts between 0% - 3%.

Chair Laven requested clarification from members who serve on Budget & Personnel, if RNDC will then be using reserves for any cash shortfalls. Femrite, as chair of Budget & Personnel, noted that was the consensus of the committee. Discussion followed.

Rohlfing moved to approve a recommendation 1% levy increase to the Full Commission. Femrite seconded. Motion carried. Dranttel, Loveall, and Schafer opposed.

Battern noted that during the Budget & Personnel Committee meeting, it was approved to have a 2% increase for salary enhancements.

Schafer moved to approve recommendation of 1 Step (2%) and 2% COLA increase. Loveall seconded. Motion carried.

VIII. CHAIR'S REPORT

A. Resolution 2023 – 07 – Proposed FY24 Meeting Dates

Chair Laven asked Griensewic to go over the proposed FY24 Meeting Dates with the board. Two drafted options were presented, each showing different potential dates to avoid potential scheduling conflicts. The board agreed that Option 1, best suited their needs.

Boettger moved to approve Option 1 of Resolution 2023 – 07 Proposed FY24 Meeting Dates. Loveall seconded. Motion carried.

IX. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Griensewic shared with the board that a bill to establish Juneteenth as a state-recognized holiday has been signed into law by Governor Walz. The new holiday becomes effective before June 19th of this year, requiring the day to be observed.

Griensewic noted that the Budget & Personnel Committee is in the process of drafting and reviewing the following items:

- Code of Conduct policy for RNDC
- Policy Manual revisions
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Emergency Succession Plans for Executive Director & Finance Director roles
- Crisis Playbook

Griensewic shared that she is working with staff on compiling a Budget & Personnel packet for all the pertinent information for committee members.

Griensewic shared that Steve Etcher, from MarksNelson has been working with Budget & Personnel Committee to draft goals for the Executive Director position.

Griensewic shared that Sabri Fair has received a salary enhancement and a title change. Fair will now have the title of Environment and Sustainability Planner.

Griensewic requested the Region Nine staff to have the opportunity to end their work week at 3:30 p.m. on Fridays from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The extra hour is to be made up at some point during the week.

Griensewic noted that summer hours have been approved for the previous four years and proposes adopting summer hours into the updated policy manual going forward.

Griensewic shared that Cheryal Hills, Executive Director at Region 5 Development (R5DC) Commission spoke to the Budget & Personnel Committee about their transition from the Decision Band Method to Performance Based Pay. The Budget & Personnel Committee was supportive of exploring the possible transition.

Griensewic addressed a question that was brought up at the May 10th Board Meeting regarding Wells Fargo late charges. Griensewic clarified that the late charges were a result of the Finance Department being unable to print checks during the modern workplace transition. Battern shared that Thriveon had to manually adjust the printer.

Griensewic followed up with more information regarding the Local Foods Grant that was brought up in the May 10th Board Meeting. Griensewic noted that the Local Foods Grant will provide \$60,000 each year for the next five years. Discussion followed.

Griensewic shared an infographic of the timeline for the Executive Director Compensation Process.

Griensewic shared the following Grant Updates with the Board:

- Comfrey Resiliency
 - o Planning Grants for Stormwater, Wastewater & Community Resilience
 - o Sharp & Fair have been leading this plan in conjunction with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
 - o The Grant is for \$8,550

- NUBRIC Grant
 - o Grant Research and reporting
 - o Braekkan has been the lead
 - o The Grant is for \$7,857
- EDA FDI Grant
 - o Still under review

Griensewic shared an email from Susan Brehm, EDA Chicago Office Regional Director, expressing her appreciation for the hospitality extended during her visit to the region. The email also conveyed her gratitude for the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the regional challenges and opportunities.

Griensewic shared a new program, MiNkota Regional Food Business Center (RFBC). Griensewic shared the RFBC will offer technical assistance, coordination and capacity building small and mid-sized food and farm businesses. The duration for the RFBC will be five years and Sabri will take the lead. Discussion followed.

Griensewic noted that RNDC is currently conducting a survey for MBFFA and requested any commissioners involved in agriculture to take the survey and/or pass along the survey information to individuals within their networks.

Griensewic shared the State Competitiveness Fund with the Board. Griensewic noted that RDO's would be able to apply for up to \$300,000 to use for technical assistance for municipalities regarding, clean energy, and climate resiliency. Griensewic commented that the State Competitiveness Fund is new and not a lot of details have been released. Griensewic shared that work being done in Minnesota has received significant attention, with partners activity reaching out to Minnesota RDO's expressing their desire to collaborate. Discussion followed.

Griensewic shared the Ferrario received a scholarship into the UN Summer Academy taking place June 26 – June 30th, 2023. The funding is covered by North Rhine – Westphalia.

Griensewic shared the article in which she nominated Commissioner Omar to the MYLAP program.

Griensewic shared the current commissioner vacancies. Griensewic noted that the two applicants for the Public Interest Commissioner- Health & Human Services will be joining the RNDC bus tour. Griensewic requested that the remaining vacancies be filled in the fall

following outreach to encourage applications throughout the summer months. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Schafer has noted that the Martin County, City of Fairmont representative hasn't been participating in Full Commission meetings. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Loveall requested clarification on if RNDC was working with Welcoming Communities. Griensewic noted that RNDC is not working on any Welcoming Communities work at this time.

A. Manufacturing Resolution 2023 – 08

Griensewic revisited the Manufacturing Resilience discussion that was held at the May 10th Board of Directors meeting. Griensewic noted the Kristian Braekkan brought forward the Manufacturing Resilience plan and noted that the Resolution would be up for approval at this meeting.

Schafer moved to approve Manufacturing Resolution 2023 – 08. Dranttel seconded. Motion carried.

X. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Commissioner Updates

Commissioners shared updates from the municipalities.

B. Meeting Evaluation

Chair Laven reminded the members of the Board to fill out the meeting evaluation handout.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Femrite moved to adjourn. Boettger seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 6:24p.m.

Mike Laven, Chair

Jim Branstad, Secretary

REGION NINE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
TREASURER'S REPORT
June 30, 2023

CASH BALANCE May 31, 2023 **\$ 2,638,005.56**

Cash Receipts - Checking	392,749.51	
Cash Receipts - Savings	-	
6 County deposits and interest	1,110.20	
9 County deposits and interest	10,724.54	
Tornado deposits and interest	3,644.86	
Cares deposits and interest	9,573.18	
Micro deposits and interest	451.96	
Interest	2,221.24	
TOTAL RECEIPTS		\$ 420,475.49
Payroll Disbursements		(78,636.77)
Accounts Payable & Other Disbursements		(475,256.01)

CASH BALANCE June 30, 2023 **\$ 2,504,588.27**

Region Nine Checking and Savings	
Checking	\$ 435,440.77
Savings	19,473.96
Total	\$ 454,914.73

Revolving Loan Funds	
6 County	\$ 165,003.92
9 County	400,277.44
Tornado	446,460.02
Cares Act	217,734.99
Micro	820,197.17
Total	\$ 2,049,673.54

CASH BALANCE June 30, 2023 **\$ 2,504,588.27**

REGION NINE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
JUNE 2023 CASH RECEIPTS
FY23

Description	Amount
DATE: 6/5/23	
MN State ACH - Transit Contract	653.77
DATE: 6/12/23	
MN State ACH - Transit Contract	2,100.12
DATE: 6/13/23	
Waseca County Tax Settlement	25,750.19
GMG Mainstreet Revitalization	2,660.00
WCIF MADO Dashboard	103.40
MMDC MADO Dashboard	103.40
SWRDC MADO Dashboard	103.40
UMVRDC MADO Dashboard	103.40
SMIF Prosperity Initiative	375.00
MBFFA May Billing	4,054.60
DATE: 6/14/23	
Renewing the Country Side ACH	515.00
DATE: 6/16/23	
9 County Transfer to GF for Prior Loan Disbursements	250,000.00
DATE: 6/20/23	
Scott County Tax Settlement	4,980.22
DATE: 6/21/23	
MN State ACH - Transit Contract	4,226.42
DATE: 6/22/23	
Sibley County Tax Settlement	29,723.97
HRDC MADO Dashboard	103.40
Faribault County Tax Settlement	34,165.76
DATE: 6/26/23	
Brown County Tax Settlement	33,027.46
DATE: 6/30/23	
June Interest Earned	323.23
JUNE 2023 TOTALS	393,072.74

Region Nine Development Commission
Board Payment Listing - June of 2023

Check#	Check Date	Vendor Name	Check Amount	Description
115999	06/12/2023	Belgard, Elliot R	92.40	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
116000	06/12/2023	Branstad, Jim	92.40	Mileage and Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116001	06/12/2023	Femrite, Lyle	50.48	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
			50.48	Mileage and Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116002	06/12/2023	GHG Corporation	75.00	Clockwise Timesheet Software - Invoice #95301
116003	06/12/2023	Guerrero, Maria	118.47	Interpreting Services and Mileage May St. James - 5/23/23 Invoice
116004	06/12/2023	Harris, Paul	86.88	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
116005	06/12/2023	Infinity Catering, LLC	963.15	Voided Check for Overpayment
	06/14/2023		963.15	Voided Check for Overpayment
116006	06/12/2023	Kruse, David	1,034.00	MADO Dashboard Expenses - Invoice #KT2154
			720.67	Region Nine MADO Dashboard Hosting Fees - Invoice #KT2151
116007	06/12/2023	Laven, Mike	40.00	Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116008	06/12/2023	Lilienthal, Christian	88.47	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
116009	06/12/2023	Living Earth Center	2,283.60	USDA Grant Expenditures - Invoice #1014
116010	06/12/2023	Loveall, Tom H	85.85	Mileage and Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116011	06/12/2023	Metro Sales Inc	377.25	Contract Copier Base Rate 5/27/23 to 6/26/23 - Invoice #INV2294858
116012	06/12/2023	Omar, Ayan	59.65	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
116013	06/12/2023	Principal Life Insurance Company	246.52	Life Insurance Premiums 6/15/23 to 7/14/23
116014	06/12/2023	Richter, Gary	109.43	Mileage and Per Diem B&P Meeting 5/31/23
116015	06/12/2023	Rohlfing, Steve J	67.51	Mileage and Per Diem 5/31 B&P Meeting
			67.51	Mileage and Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116016	06/12/2023	Schafer, Philip H	122.53	Mileage and Per Diem 6/7/23 Board Meeting
116017	06/12/2023	Shred-It, C/O Stericycle Inc	130.98	Shredding Services May 2023 - Invoice #8003922316
116018	06/12/2023	Spectrum	119.98	Business Internet 5/23/23 to 6/22/23 - Invoice #0820665052323
116019	06/12/2023	Spirited Journeys LLC	1,080.00	USDA Grant Expenditures - Invoice #1311A
116020	06/12/2023	Thriveon Inc	2,944.50	Firewall Upgrade Balance - Invoice #176110
			3,365.17	Monthly IT Support - Invoice #175504
116021	06/12/2023	Vanderberg Cleaning Services LLC	388.35	Janitorial Services June - Invoice #15774
116022	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	35.86	Hy-Vee Mankato - Fuel for Traverse - 4/28 - KB
			35.06	Speedway North Mankato, MN - Fuel for Traverse - 5/3 - KB
			11.94	Raising Cane's Lunch Fin. Dir. Meeting - St. Cloud - 5/3 - KB
			126.00	USPS - 2 Rolls Stamps - 5/9 - KB
116023	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	25.54	U.S. Attorney General RNAI Registration Fee - 5/12
			48.16	Hy-Vee Mankato, MN - Fuel for Traverse - 4/24 - JH
			68.08	Sakura Restaurant St. Paul, MN - Meal - 5/15 - JH
			398.32	Hyatt Place St. Paul - Hotel Stay - 5/16 - JH
116024	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	36.56	Accidental Personal Charge - 5/1 - PF
116025	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	161.71	Zoom Account Annual Fee - 4/23 - HB
			7.99	Hy-Vee Mankato, MN - Cookies for Commission Meeting - 5/3 - HB
			40.00	Greater Mankato Growth Legislative Forum Registration - 5/10 - HB
			(15.00)	Registration Discount Refund from GMG - 5/15 - HB
			75.72	Mankato Motors Oil Change for Traverse - 5/10 - HB
116026	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	10.00	Parking Ramp Minneapolis - 4/22 - NG
			704.67	AirBNB for MADO Exec. Dir. Meeting 6/12 to 6/15 - 1st Payment - 4/24 - NG
			0.99	Apple iCloud Storage - 4/25 - NG
			51.35	Olive's Mankato Susan Brehm Visit - 5/8 - NG
			41.68	NolaBelle Mankato, MN - Meal - 5/9 - NG
116027	06/12/2023	Wells Fargo	17.01	Anchors Seafood Grill, San Jose CA - Meal - 4/26 - AB
			29.96	Crepes Bistro, Santa Clara CA - Meal - 4/26 - AB
			42.56	Fonda Colombian San Jose, CA - Meal - 4/27 - AB
			28.02	Mexcal San Jose, CA - Meal - 4/28 - AB
			3.00	Uber Tip San Jose, CA - 4/29 - AB
			13.70	Uber San Jose, CA - 4/29 - AB
			29.85	Whispers Cafe, San Jose, CA - Meal - 4/29 - AB
			498.90	Delta Air Flight San Jose, CA - 4/29 - AB
			14.58	San Jose Airport Deli - Meal - 4/29 - AB
116028	06/16/2023	Remington, LLC	200,000.00	Loan Disbursement - \$150,000 CARES RLF & \$50,000 R9 Legacy RLF
116029	06/23/2023	APG Media of So Minnesota LLC	87.45	Public Notice (multiple) 6/14 Budget Hearing - Ad #133080
116030	06/23/2023	Belgard, Elliot R	92.40	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116031	06/23/2023	Borchert, Dave	139.30	Mileage and Per Diem 6/5, 6/21
116032	06/23/2023	CenturyLink	143.94	Long Distance Toll Free Charge 5/8/23 to 6/7/23 - Invoice #644614694
116033	06/23/2023	Cooling, Steven	75.37	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116034	06/23/2023	DM Stamps & Specialties	33.80	Commissioner Name Plate - Invoice #IV00545193
116035	06/23/2023	Femrite, Lyle	51.79	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116036	06/23/2023	Friesen's LLC dba Wooden Spoon	141.28	Catering 4/19/23 - Invoice #000209
			141.28	Catering 3/15/23 - Invoice #000210
116037	06/23/2023	Glidden, Elroy	128.60	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commssion Meeting and Bus Tour
116038	06/23/2023	Goblirsch, Robert	264.80	Mileage and Per Diem 5/3, 6/5, 6/9, 6/21 Meetings
116039	06/23/2023	Infinity Catering, LLC	642.10	Catering for 6/21 Bus Tour - Invoice #2264
116040	06/23/2023	Laven, Mike	50.00	Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116041	06/23/2023	Lilienthal, Christian	88.47	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116042	06/23/2023	Loveall, Tom H	85.85	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116043	06/23/2023	Mankato Parking, City of	258.90	City of Mankato Parking - Invoice #17301
116044	06/23/2023	Milbrath, Mary	57.86	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116045	06/23/2023	Neubau Holdings LLC	3,115.00	July 2023 Office Space Lease Payment
116046	06/23/2023	Nowell, Shanon	59.17	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116047	06/23/2023	O'Connor, Patty	40.00	Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116048	06/23/2023	Oeltnjenbruns, Keira	51.79	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116049	06/23/2023	Pfeil, Mike	97.16	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116050	06/23/2023	Richter, Gary	119.43	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116051	06/23/2023	Schafer, Philip H	133.84	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting and Bus Tour
116052	06/23/2023	Schlueter, Scott A	66.20	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
116053	06/23/2023	The Free Press	15.50	Public Notice 6/21 Budget Hearing - Ad #714751
116054	06/23/2023	Truman Tribune	24.13	Public Notice 6/21 Budget Hearing - Invoice #21176
116055	06/23/2023	Verizon Wireless	204.49	Cell Phone 5/9/23 to 6/8/23 - Invoice #9936759191
116056	06/23/2023	Wilkening, Rob	72.75	Mileage and Per Diem 6/21 Commission Meeting
Check Total	224,849.24			
Report Total:	224,849.24			

Finance

- The banking conversion from Wells Fargo to US Bank/PFM MAGIC Fund is nearly complete. The final steps include syncing our established MAGIC accounts to that of the US Bank Singlepoint platform, the transferring of funds, and then any applicable training related to using the new system. The organization has received new credit cards for its staff and those will be distributed upon the finalization of all other steps. All Wells Fargo cards will be collected and shredded.
- R9 has been in discussion with Blue Earth County regarding potentially taking over the administration of the area's Emergency Communications Board (ECB). Blue Earth County has served notice to the ECB stating they will no longer be assuming these responsibilities. The program works to ensure that emergency responders have the ability and bandwidth to reliably communicate in disaster or emergency situations. The coverage area for this program approximately matches the service area for R9. Member's of the ECB would pay a set fee to R9 to oversee the program and we would need to allocate approximately 500 hours of staff time. Headwaters Regional Development Commission in Northern Minnesota operate their area's ECB and we've had discussions with those that oversee the operation. R9 is currently waiting to hear back from Blue Earth County and the State regarding next steps.
- R9's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 of each year. Much of my time in July has been allocated to year end audit preparation and new year roll forwards. Our audit is scheduled to take place the week of August 14th.
- Paola and I have been working with a Monday.com consultant, Kelten Sharp, to improve our utilization of the Monday.com project management software that we implemented in the spring of this year. We believe we're making good progress in adapting the platform to our specific needs and purposes.

Revolving Loan Fund

- Over the week of July 17th interviews were held for our Lending Specialist position. We are pleased to announce that Courtney Wright has accepted our offer for this position, and we greatly look forward to her joining our team on August 21st. Courtney has spent her career with US Bank and has progressed her way up to that of the Branch Manager for the Austin, MN location. She holds both a Bachelor's Degree in Finance as well as a Master of Business Administration. We are confident that she will be a great addition to our team and an asset to our 9 county region.
- Several projects and applications are currently being worked through as our area's entrepreneurs work to finalize their planned projects.

Region Nine Area, Inc.

- No information to report.



Sample Code of Conduct

01.Purpose.

The Commission of Region Nine Development Commission determines a code of conduct for its members. By eliminating conflicts of interest and providing standards for conduct in commission matters, the commission hopes to promote the faith and confidence of the citizens of the region in their government.

02. Standards of conduct.

Subd. 1. No member of the commission may knowingly:

- a. Violate the Open Meeting Law
- b. Participate in a matter that affects the person's financial interests or those of a business with which the person is associated, unless the effect on the person or business is no greater than on other members of the same business classification, profession, or occupation.
- c. Use the person's public position to secure special privileges or exemptions for the person or for others.
- d. Use the person's public position to solicit personal gifts or favors.
- e. Use the person's public position for personal gain.
- f. Except as specifically permitted pursuant to Minn. Stat. 471.895, accept or receive any gift of substance, whether in the form of money, services, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, promise, or any other form, under circumstances in which it could be reasonably expected to influence the person, the person's performance of official action, or be intended as a reward for the person's official action.
- g. Disclose to the public, or use for the person's or another person's personal gain, information that was gained by reason of the person's public position if the information was not public data or was discussed at a closed session of the commission.
- h. Disclose information that was received, discussed, or decided in conference with the city's legal counsel that is protected by the attorney-client privilege unless a majority of the commission has authorize the disclosure.
- i. Represent private interests before the commission.

VII. Chair's Report

A. DRAFT Code of Conduct Review

Subd. 2 Except as prohibited by the provisions of Minn. Stat. 471.87, there is no violation of subdivision 1 b. of this section for a matter that comes before the board, or commission if the member of the board, or commission publicly discloses the circumstances that would violate these standards and refrains from participating in the discussion and vote on the matter. Nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit a contract with a member of the commission under the circumstances described under Minn. Stat. 471.88, if proper statutory procedures are followed.

03.Complain, hearing.

Any person may file a written complaint with the Executive Director alleging a violation of the standards of conduct in section .02. The complaint must contain supporting facts for the allegation.

The commission may hold a hearing after receiving the written complaint or upon the commission's own violation. A hearing must be held only if the commission determines:

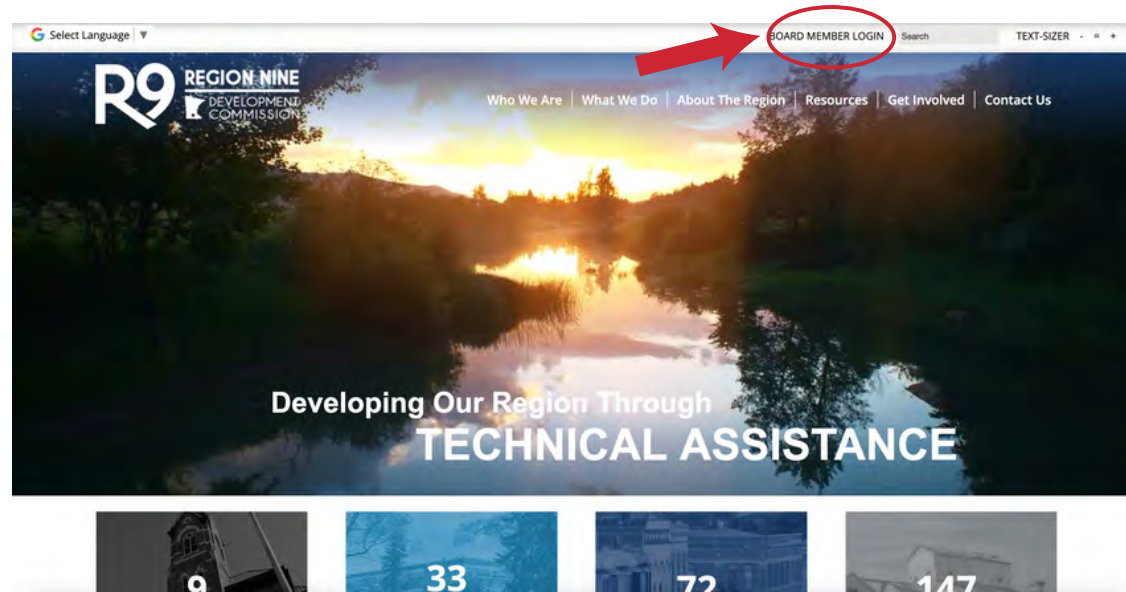
- 1.) Upon advice of the commission's attorney, designee, or other attorney appointed by the commission, that the factual allegations state a sufficient claim of violation of these standards or rise to the level of a legally recognized conflict of interest, and
- 2.) That the complaint has been lodged in good faith and not for impermissible purposes such as delay.

The commission's determination must be made within 30 days of the filing of the allegation with the Executive Director. If the commission determines that there is an adequate justification for holding a hearing, the hearing must be held within 30 days of the commission's determination.

At the hearing, the person accused must have the opportunity to be heard. If, after the hearing, the commission finds that a violation of the standard has occurred or does exist, the commission may censure the person, refer the matter for criminal prosecution, request an official not to participate in a decision, or remove an appointed member of an advisory board or commission from commission.

Region Nine Board Portal

Where to Find the Region Nine Board Portal



Go to www.rndc.org

Clicking on the Board Portal Login will bring you to the login page

Logging in

Enter your username, which will follow the format First name.Last name with no spaces.

Then enter Region9DC! and check 'I'm not a robot' before clicking 'Log In.'

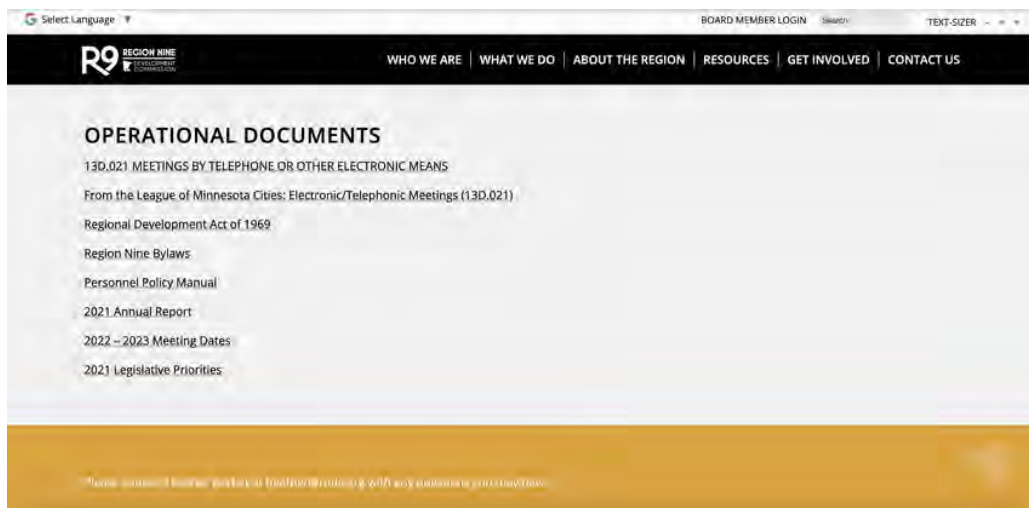
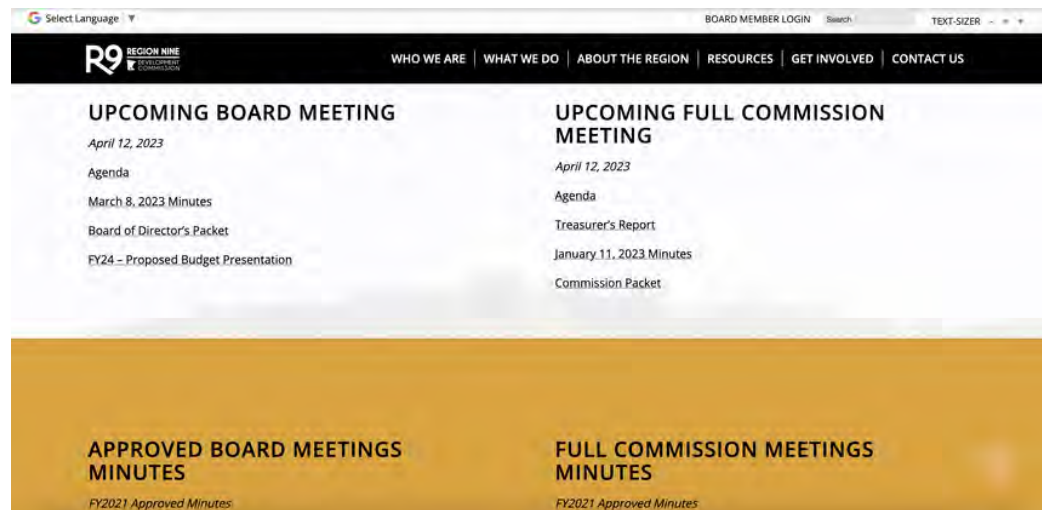
[Do not change or reset your password.](#)

*If you have questions, please contact Heather Bartelt
at 507.389.8864 or heather@rndc.org*

What to Expect From Your Board Portal



Scrolling Down



Scrolling down the page, you will see Region Nine's mission statement and videos. Next, you will find packets prior to meetings, presentations, and additional information that is available.

*If you have questions, please contact Heather Bartelt
at 507.389.8864 or heather@rndc.org*



Region Nine Growers Network

Region Nine Development Commission (MN)

A core tenet of economic development recognizes that the geographic clustering of similar businesses can help regional economies become [more competitive and resilient](#). Though intuitively it might appear that similar businesses would cannibalize each other's sales, proximity helps businesses develop more efficient practices, grow their supply chain, and build a larger customer base that can sustain more output from their industry over time. Moreover, businesses can cooperate with each other to share best practices and create a broader ecosystem of sellers and buyers that increases the overall strength of their industry.

[Region Nine Development Commission \(RNDC\)](#) undertook a planning process in 2016 with the goal of increasing the resiliency of the agricultural sector in the south-central Minnesota region it serves. Through this effort, staff discovered that the region had a significant opportunity to grow its cluster of small sustainable farmers. Sustainable farming—an umbrella term for a collection of agricultural practices that seek to meet society's present food needs without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same—is generally practiced by smaller farmers with limited resources and less access to markets and supply chains than large conglomerates enjoy. In RNDC's nine-county region, sustainable farmers were an important part of the local agricultural ecosystem, generating value for the communities they served with fresh food and intentional ecological practices.

Planners at RNDC recognized these benefits and sought to help grow the cluster of these small sustainable farmers in the region. They launched a series of listening sessions with existing farmers that led to the creation of the [Region Nine Growers Network](#). The Network serves as a space to bring together an array of sustainable farmers across the region with monthly meetings held outside the growing season and support services from RNDC. At the meetings, farmers share updates, present to each other on pertinent topics, and conduct brainstorming sessions to solve common problems. RNDC staff make themselves available to facilitate discussions and connect farmers to outside resources like funding opportunities and business-to-business introductions.

The growing network, which currently has over 20 members, is funded in part by [USDA](#) and [National Resources Conservation Service](#) grants that aim to grow the local foods economy and increase opportunities for emerging farmers. RNDC staff work to accomplish this by facilitating connections with restaurants and grocery stores and providing space at a local community farm for emerging farmers to hone their craft. This year, five new historically underrepresented farmers were recruited to join the network through the community farm initiative. The Network's continuous growth demonstrates its value to farmers, who in turn deliver fresh food with sustainable practices that benefit local communities and help fulfill the potential that the cluster of farms brings for the whole regional economy.

"One of the biggest things that people always talk about is that they're with people doing the same things as them, which makes it easy to learn a lot from each other," says Sabri Fair, Associate Planner at RNDC. "It's one of the more unique things that we're doing right now; it's new for us and new for our community, pushing the boundary of local food work."

This case study was written by Dion Thompson-Davoli, NADO RF Research Fellow

Staff Updates – August 2023

Nicole Griensewic

Staffing Update

Courtney Richards, Loan Specialist

Interviews were conducted for the Loan Specialist Position. After meeting with several qualified candidates an offer was extended to Courtney Richards, and she accepted. Courtney will start with RNDC on August 21st. Prior to this role, Courtney served as the US Bank branch manager in Austin, MN.

Economic Recovery Corps, 2nd Round

The job description that Paola wrote was selected for the 2nd round for an IEDC-funded Economic Recovery Corps. More details are shared under her report.

Intern Posting

RNDC is looking to bring on an intern. Alejandra is drafting an intern job description. We are looking at adding interns to add capacity but also give our planners an opportunity to supervise. Historically, SCSC has reimbursed RNDC for up to 400 hours per student for giving them an opportunity to serve the public sector.

Georgetown Impact Fellows

Nicole has been actively engaged with the Georgetown School of Business regarding their Impact Fellows program. We are looking to host 1-2 graduate students this fall and spring to complete 500 hours of applied work in our region. We are looking to create a collaborative relationship with Georgetown's School of Business, as they are actively involved in economic development. RNDC would either directly or indirectly pay for the student's time at an hourly rate of approx. \$20/hour. Being a formal partner with Georgetown's School of Business would then ensure they provide supervision and support to the students as well as host organization. Nicole and Kristian would be the staff to oversee the work.

Alejandra's Employment Status

Alejandra is currently holding an H1-B visa, which authorizes her to work in the United States within a specialized occupation that requires both specific expertise and a bachelor's degree. Following a successful internship and fellowship, RNDC has taken the initiative to petition for Alejandra's retention due to her exceptional qualifications and unique skill set, which are notably scarce in the job market. Being an employer qualified for cap exemption,

our organization is empowered to seek continuous employment for Alejandra, leveraging her expertise to contribute to research endeavors benefiting local communities, the state, and the federal government. In our commitment to ensuring that Alejandra fulfills an essential organizational role, we will diligently assess her ongoing suitability for the position and even consider other candidates through a formal posting process. Upon completing two years of employment, Alejandra will undergo a smooth transition from her visa status to an employment permit, leading to a reduction in turnover-related expenses. Alejandra's invaluable assets to RNDC include her master's degree in public administration, bilingual proficiency, and specialized knowledge in economic development. Her expertise has made her an indispensable member of our organization, and we are profoundly grateful for the privilege of hosting a foreign national with such exceptional talents and qualifications.

NADO Recap

Nicole recently participated in the NADO Board of Directors meeting from June event from June 26-28th.

Blue Earth Light and Water (BELW)

RNDC was asked to provide a letter of support for a Blue Earth Light and Water (BELW) project. This project focuses on undergrounding the distribution system, improving transformers, implementing advanced metering systems, and integrating sustainable renewable energy in alignment with state and federal initiatives. The BELW initiative benefits the community and utility customers by reducing rates and enhancing climate resiliency while ensuring staff protection. The funding is through the Department of Energy's Improvement in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA).

Congressman Finstad's Office Support

RNDC collaborated with Congressman Finstad's office to obtain a Letter of Support (LOS) for Waseca's Manufacturing Resource Center.

EDA FDI Grant

Nicole learned that RNDC's T.A. grant application to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for Foreign Direct Investment work (FDI) was unsuccessful. The grant request was for \$98k. May look to other funders to support the proposed work.

REV Program

The city of Gaylord made it to the next round of the REV program with Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation. RNDC provided a letter of support for their application.

IEDC Scholarship

Both Nicole and Paola have been informed of their selection as recipients of the International Economic Development (IEDC) Annual Conference scholarships, each amounting to \$612.50. This scholarship has been awarded to both individuals in recognition of their attendance at the first-time conference to be held in Dallas from September 17th to 20th. However, neither have registered yet as travel costs are not covered.

Global Workforce Program with GreenSeam

RNDC wants to help get the word out for businesses in the region that seek to hire an international workforce, with special focus on those involved in agriculture.

An initial \$1,000 consultation with an employment lawyer and a consultant to guide businesses on including international individuals in their workforce. Additionally, they provide up to \$2,000 in matching funds to businesses pursuing further support.

Partner Updates

MnDOT Planning Grant

Currently, there are ongoing discussions regarding the possibility of increasing the planning grant supported by MnDOT for the MADO offices.

NADO Site Visit and Staff Training

NADO contacted Nicole to ask if their staff could do a site visit for their professional development. Region Nine will highlight projects and partnerships across the region to help the newer NADO staff better understand the work of a local EDD. The scheduled event is slated for August 31st.

NRW/USA Partnership

We are exploring a more formalized partnership with NRW as they celebrate 2023-2034 as the year of NRW/USA. They are asking to have our CSM work, delegation and ongoing work highlighted on their website (nrw-usa.nrw).

Commissioner Updates

Doug Trytten

RNDC is mourning the loss of Doug Trytten, who passed away on July 12th after a long battle with cancer. RNDC plans to recognize his service in our e-newsletter and present a Certificate of Service. Staff have also sent a card to his wife Deann.

Stephanie Hilpipre

Nicole has learned that Stephanie Hilpipre has been elected to replace Richard Peterson in representing Le Sueur County Townships. Orientation will be arranged for all new commissioners to ensure a smooth transition. Commissioner Peterson will also be recognized for his service to RNDC.

Waseca County Commissioner Replacement

RNDC was told that Brad Krause was recently appointed to replace the Waseca County commissioner position for RNDC that Blair Nelson held. Once on-boarded, the Waseca County caucus will need to determine who will serve on the RNDC board.

Heather Bartelt

Aside from taking some vacation time this past month, Heather has been inquiring on new venues to hold the upcoming Full Commission Meeting on October 11th, setting up interviews for the Lending Specialist position, and working to assist RNDC staff with setting up various meetings taking place off-site.

Another priority of Heather's has been setting up County Board Presentations for Nicole. Heather secured a time for Nicole to meet with the Martin County Board on September 19th.

Alejandra Bejarano

The Waseca-Le Sueur grant was completed last month. Alejandra submitted a final report to the Minnesota Office of Broadband, which included a digital asset inventory listing existing strengths, tools, organizations, programs, services, and resources in the Waseca-Le Sueur region. The report integrated quantitative and qualitative data collected through stakeholder engagement, as well as minutes and information from the Digital Connection Committee formed as part of the grant.

As part of the task force and the Annual Performance Report on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Alejandra facilitated an in-person meeting with task force members at Bridge Plaza. During the meeting, participants discussed key workforce

development needs for the region. The input and insights collected during the session will be used as part of the planning process for this year's APR. Going forward, task force members will continue to meet monthly via Zoom, with the option for occasional in-person meetings.

Alejandra participated in the hiring process of the new lending specialist. The interview process has been completed, and recommendations have been made to leadership. A candidate has been selected and is expected to start next month.

Alejandra has also taken on the responsibility of leading the Community and Economic Development (CED) committee, which will convene in August and October. Going forward, the committee will meet quarterly, and these meetings will be utilized for planning future speakers and topics.

A fellow Minnesota Young American Leaders Program (MYALP) graduate invited Alejandra to join the board of the French American Chamber of Commerce in Minnesota. Alejandra submitted an application and received the board's endorsement.

Additionally, Alejandra was selected to serve as a judge for the 2023 International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Excellence Awards program. She reviewed and graded the nominations, playing a role in selecting this year's winners.

Kristian Braekkan

Kristian completed a contractual market assessment for SMIF in late July, complete with recommendations regarding the organization's REV and PI programming. He is scheduled to present the findings and recommendations to staff in late September and to the Board of Trustees in mid-October. He also completed and submitted the USDA required feasibility study for Neighbor's Meat in New Richland (Waseca County) as part of the MBFFA grant.

He has also supported Waseca County's application to the federal EDA for funding to renovate and upgrade the former Mutual building's first floor into a manufacturing/workforce resource center, seek funding for machining training from the Department of Defense through a hub-and-spoke project in collaboration with St. Cloud State and the Minnesota Center for Excellence in Engineering. This also includes programming in LEAN and cybersecurity. Finally, Kristian is working with Alejandra and Corree on redesigning the R9 dashboard to track and monitor the measures identified in the CEDS and the APR. more adequately.

Sabri Fair

Sabri was successful in getting Local Foods Week off the ground and onto people's plates across the region. The goal of the event was to create meaningful connections between local farms and restaurants and educate community members on all the amazing food that is

grown in our region so they can support local businesses. This year's dishes, participating farms, and restaurants include;

- Plum and Apricot Ice Cream at Mom & Pops (Mankato) featuring Plums and Apricots from Alternative Roots Farm in Madelia
- Mushroom Pizza at Pleasant Grove Pizza Farm (Waseca) featuring Mushrooms from Rebel Rooster Farm in Good Thunder
- Southwest BBQ Pizza at Chankaska Creek Winery (Kasota) featuring Pork from K&M Fischer Farm in Hanska
- Garlic scape chicken paired with a cup of tomato basil soup at Wooden Spoon (Mankato) featuring herbs from Under the Sun Herbs
- Lamb Chops and Lamb Stew at Amboy Cottage Café (Amboy) featuring lamb from Blissful Bee Pastures in Gibbon
- Pork Chops at Pappageorge (Mankato) featuring pork from Blue Dirt Farm in Blue Earth
- Arugula and Beet Flatbread at Bar on Main (Waseca) featuring Arugula and Beets from Cedar Crate Farm in Waldorf
- Farmer's Market Salad, and Turkey Pesto Sandwich at River Rock Coffee featuring lettuce and carrots from Cedar Crate Farm in Waldorf

This month Sabri worked with the community of Comfrey to solicit bids for solar at their wastewater treatment plant, the largest utility bill the city pays. The solar bids showed that the system would pay for itself in 12 years and then provide an additional 18 years of free electricity. Although this is still a great benefit Sabri will work with the community to apply for grants to further reduce the cost and increase the benefits to the community.

Sabri and Sam have been in conversations with the Northcountry Cooperative Foundation about applying for a Department of Energy grant to conduct deep energy efficiency retrofits at the manufactured home parks they work with, three of which are in Region Nine in Madelia, Gaylord, and Fairmont.

Sabri has moved to the next round of applying for funding from the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) to conduct a regional food recovery plan. The goal of the plan is to help food shelves, pantries, and banks across the region more successfully capture excess food from distribution centers, food processors, and grocery stores so that it can feed people instead of going into landfills. For example, last week SC MN Food Recovery took 2.5 tons worth of sweet potatoes off a truck that was rejected from the Walmart distribution center. But there was still another 2.5 tons that were unable to find a home, so they ended up in the Blue Earth County landfill. The plan will identify and track organizations holding capacity and food needs so that more food is saved.

Paola Ferrario

BDO Zone: As a result of their successful grant application, RNDC is thrilled to announce their achievement of winning the HeroX Federal Prize, a substantial sum of \$100,000, for the development of a certification that will pave the way for promoting the region as a Biofuel Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone.

A BDO Zone is a designated area that fosters the growth and implementation of sustainable biofuel technologies. By becoming a certified BDO Zone, Region Nine will position itself as a leader in sustainable development and play a crucial role in advancing the use of biofuels.

The certification obtained through the HeroX Federal Prize will allow Region Nine to establish strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, such as the Department of Agriculture, GreaterMSP (Minneapolis-Saint Paul Regional Economic Development Partnership), and the CAAFI (Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuel Initiative). These collaborations will further drive the region's progress toward becoming a prominent hub for biofuel production and utilization.

By embracing biofuel technologies, Region Nine aims to contribute significantly to the aviation industry's transition towards sustainable practices. The partnership with CAAFI will play a pivotal role in integrating biofuels into commercial aviation, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing the overall sustainability of the industry.

This achievement marks a significant milestone for Region Nine. With the HeroX Federal Prize funding, we will be well-positioned to develop and implement the necessary infrastructure and initiatives to realize their vision of becoming a leading region for biofuel production and a model for sustainable development.

Looking ahead, RNDC is now eligible to apply for another federal prize of \$200,000, thanks to the certification we have obtained. With this newfound qualification, RNDC aims to utilize the prize money to further promote the region and its initiatives. If successful in their application, the award will be granted next year, providing us with additional resources to continue their impactful work.

ERC Fellow: Region Nine has advanced in securing another grant opportunity for staffing, the Economic Recovery Corps (ERC) Fellow, a program spearheaded by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA). RNDC was selected for the interview process to become a host to this fellow, moving forward from over 500 applicants nationwide.

The IEDC ERC Fellow program is a prestigious initiative led by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) in collaboration with the EDA. The program aims to support economic recovery efforts in communities by providing them with highly skilled

professionals known as ERC Fellows. These Fellows are equipped with the expertise and knowledge needed to address various economic challenges and implement strategies for sustainable growth.

For RNDC, being selected as a recipient of the IEDC ERC Fellow program is a significant opportunity. It would mean gaining access to a dedicated expert who will work closely with local leaders and stakeholders to assess the region's economic landscape, identify areas for improvement, and develop targeted solutions. The ERC Fellow will bring valuable insights, best practices, and fresh perspectives to the region's economic development initiatives, facilitating the implementation of effective measures that align with the community's unique needs and goals.

The prize for receiving a Fellow through the IEDC ERC Fellow program includes various valuable benefits. The successful candidate is awarded a 30-month contract, where they will be involved in an economic development project closely aligned with their professional background and skills. This opportunity allows them to apply their expertise to real-world challenges and contribute to the region's economic growth and recovery.

The Fellow receives a generous annual fellowship stipend of \$90,000 for the entire duration of 2.5 years, amounting to a total of \$225,000. This financial support enables the Fellow to fully immerse themselves in the project without financial concerns, allowing them to focus entirely on their role and responsibilities.

“Building a Bigger Table”: Paola has been accepted to participate in the program "Building a Bigger Table: An Organizing and Advocacy Learning Lab." This program is designed to provide participants with extensive training and resources to enhance their abilities in community organizing and advocacy work.

"Building a Bigger Table" focuses on equipping participants with the necessary tools and strategies to foster inclusivity and diversity in their community engagement efforts. Through workshops, mentorship, and interactive learning experiences, the program aims to empower individuals like Paola to create more equitable and inclusive spaces for all members of the community.

United Nations Summer Academy Scholarship: Paola has been awarded the scholarship for the UN Summer Academy on Governance for Sustainable Development, with the full cost of \$700 provided by the German Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia. The prestigious program focuses on providing comprehensive training in governance strategies and sustainable development practices.

The training covers a wide range of topics, including policy implementation, effective governance frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and the integration of sustainable development goals into decision-making processes. Through this immersive learning

experience, participants acquire valuable insights and practical skills to drive positive change and create more sustainable communities.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): In regard to foreign direct investment, RNDC was not awarded the FDI Technical Assistance grant that it had sought with the EDA. However, despite this setback, Paola, a determined advocate for the region's development, managed to secure an in-person meeting with an anaerobic digester company from Denmark. This company has expressed interest in setting up digesters in the region, and another German digester company has also shown interest in establishing a presence in Region Nine.

This development is significant for Region Nine in its pursuit of becoming a Biofuel Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone. The potential investment from these foreign companies presents a unique opportunity for the region to advance its biofuel initiatives and drive sustainable economic growth. Anaerobic digesters play a critical role in converting organic waste into biogas, a renewable energy source that aligns with the region's focus on sustainable development.

By attracting foreign direct investment in the form of anaerobic digester companies, Region Nine can accelerate the development of its biofuel infrastructure and bolster its position as a BDO Zone. These initiatives can create new employment opportunities, foster innovation in renewable energy technologies, and contribute to the region's overall economic resilience.

USA-NRW campaign: Nicole and Paola have received an invitation from the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) to become partners in the US-NRW campaign. The campaign aims to showcase and highlight the joint efforts in international cooperation between the United States and North Rhine-Westphalia. Region Nine has been chosen to showcase its commendable work in sustainability and its dedication to fostering meaningful exchanges in the realm of economic and environmental initiatives. This was a direct result of the German Learning Exchange Program conducted last December, as international ties continue to open more doors to the region.

This partnership with the Federal State of NRW presents a valuable opportunity for Region Nine to gain international recognition for its achievements in sustainability and community engagement. Being featured in the US-NRW campaign provides a platform to share Region Nine's success stories, innovative practices, and collaborative approaches with a global audience. This visibility can attract further interest from international partners, investors, and organizations, opening doors for potential collaborations and foreign direct investment opportunities in the region.

The US-NRW campaign partnership is a strategic move for Region Nine, providing an avenue to showcase its remarkable achievements, forge new international connections, and reinforce its standing as a leader in sustainability. By actively participating in this initiative,

Region Nine can solidify its position as a progressive and collaborative region that continues to make significant contributions to global efforts in sustainable development and international cooperation.

Greenovation: Paola has successfully secured a partnership with the KlimmaKomune in Saerbeck, Germany, to collaborate on an exciting sustainability project named Greenovation. This project is currently in the works and entails the development of a sustainability incubator in Region Nine. Through Greenovation, Saerbeck will offer invaluable resources, including business-to-business (B2B) support, knowledge sharing, and educational opportunities, with the potential for expertise exchanges.

Greenovation marks a transformative initiative for both Saerbeck and Region Nine. With the project in progress, the two regions are actively working together to shape a sustainable future. Saerbeck's proven model of sustainability is being shared and integrated into the development of the sustainability incubator, providing Region Nine with valuable insights and expertise to accelerate its progress in becoming a Biofuel Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone and a leader in sustainable development within the United States.

The collaborative efforts of Greenovation could foster an ecosystem of innovation and cooperation. As this promising project unfolds, it will empower local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community members in Region Nine, equipping them with the necessary tools and resources to drive sustainable growth. By embracing and implementing sustainable practices, Greenovation aims to create a more resilient and thriving community, addressing environmental challenges, and promoting renewable energy solutions.

MBFFA: Sabri and Paola have been diligently working on a needs assessment for underrepresented agpreneurs. The comprehensive assessment is now complete, following an extensive outreach effort. They are currently compiling the gathered data and insights into a comprehensive document that will showcase the findings and provide valuable recommendations.

The preliminary findings have already been presented to the Mainstreet Business Focused on Food and Agriculture (MBFFA) group, and the feedback received has been taken into careful consideration. Moving forward, Sabri and Paola plan to incorporate the hub's feedback into the final report, which is due in November. This final report will include well-informed recommendations on how to support and empower underrepresented agpreneurs in the region.

The MBFFA plays a crucial role in promoting social and economic equity within the agricultural sector. This partnership between Minnesota State University, Mankato, and Greater Mankato Growth, Inc. aims to support and strengthen local businesses in the food and agriculture industries. By focusing on Main Street businesses, the MBFFA strives to foster

economic opportunities, increase food access, and enhance community well-being in the region.

The needs assessment sheds light on the specific challenges faced by underrepresented agpreneurs. By supporting and empowering these entrepreneurs, Region Nine can drive inclusive economic growth, enhance diversity in the agricultural sector, and create a more resilient and sustainable region.

Project Management: Paola, along with Ky and RNDC consultant, Kelten Sharp, have been working to address structural needs within the organization to implement a Project Management (PM) tool for RNDC. This endeavor aims to centralize and streamline all RNDC's projects, allowing for better project management and coordination.

Implementing a PM tool brings numerous benefits to organizations. It provides a centralized platform to track and manage various projects efficiently. With all projects accessible in one place, it becomes easier to monitor progress, allocate resources, set timelines, and identify potential bottlenecks. The PM tool also fosters collaboration among team members, enhancing communication and facilitating knowledge sharing. This improved project management process helps organizations enhance their overall productivity, reduce inefficiencies, and optimize resource allocation.

Nathan George

On June 21st the RNDC bus tour took place. This event was organized by Nathan, Heather, and Corree over the previous months. During the tour, Nathan documented all the stops and wrote the recap for the newsletter and the Annual Report. The bus tour is an opportunity to highlight RFL clients and show the work that RNDC does in the region.

Nathan has begun working on the 2023 Annual Report. The focus of this report is last year's financial report and reviewing the work that has been done. Nathan's role includes writing about the specific programs and outcomes in conjunction with the planners. He is also designing, editing, and distribution.

Nathan has also begun working with Alejandra on the Annual Performance Report. He will act in a supporting role and will also be designing and editing the report. This report evaluates the region's progress as it relates to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Nathan has wrapped up the promotion for Local Foods Week. This campaign was focused on social and traditional media channels with a focus on Facebook. The Strategic Partnership Center at Minnesota State University Mankato added paid promotion for the event page. The goal of the campaign was to drive our audience to the participating restaurants to highlight the locally sourced ingredients and the growers that provide them.

Nathan is working with Joel to produce the Local Human Services Transit report and the Safe Routes to School plan for Madelia. He will be designing, editing, and making the report ADA-compliant. The above projects are in addition to his daily tasks.

Joel Hanif

Joel submitted two reports to MnDOT District 7 in June. The first of these was one detailing past Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plans done by RNDC, including goals established and the most recent action (parent surveys, etc.) taken after the plan's completion. This report gives a good idea of what communities are positioned to compete for additional active transportation dollars soon and can help align those projects with the district's Capital Highway Investment Plan. Additionally, the report shows what schools have plans that are due for an update and what schools have yet to go through the SRTS process.

The second report was a summary and analysis of bike and pedestrian counter deployments throughout the last year. Joel and Sabri deployed counters on trails that received Transportation Alternatives funding in St. James, Sleepy Eye, and Mankato. The report showed the raw counts of pedestrians/bicyclists passing through at each site over a period of at least two weeks. The report also included weather reports for each day the counters were deployed to provide context for usage fluctuations. Finally, the report detailed any other local events that may have impacted trail counts in some way. For example, the counters in Sleepy Eye were deployed on the lake trail during the final week of school, and one of the elementary school classes had a fishing trip. This resulted in the data showing a massive increase in trail usage with all the children using the trail to get to and from the lake. Ultimately, the bike and pedestrian counter report shows the return on investment that Region Nine communities are getting on their active transportation projects.

In transit and active transportation, Joel helped organize and was an attendee at a Walkable Communities Workshop facilitator training held by MDH and Alta Planning and Design in St. Peter on July 27. This "train the trainer" session taught planners, SHIP coordinators, local government staff, and others from both Region Nine and outside the region how to effectively conduct a Walkable Communities Workshop. Joel and a few other attendees are already in the planning stages of a potential workshop to be conducted this fall.

Joel secured additional funding from MnDOT to purchase bike racks for Madelia Elementary School as part of the implementation of their SRTS Plan. Madelia Elementary School received the bike racks on June 30. Joel also submitted the final SRTS plan for Madelia to MnDOT during this reporting period. Joel also submitted the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan to MnDOT after multiple rounds of revisions. Joel is still working with SHIP to finalize the contract for the upcoming Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Schools SRTS Plan.

Corree Johnson

Corree continues to monitor the RNDC website to improve SEO, navigation, and update content as needed. She is also working on building out the integration of RNDC's regional dashboard and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide access to additional insights and resources.

Corree is working with Kristian to finalize a feasibility study for Neighbor's Meat LLC, part of the MBFFA grant ending this month, as well as aiding him as needed with developing a framework for the NUBRIC EDA grant for the needs assessment/feasibility study and creating a report for the contractual work for SMIF's assessments of REV and PI communities.

Aaron Pacheco

Aaron is continuing the two-part study with Kristian Braekkan on the impacts of income stagnation and industry diversity on the region. The project is expanding to not only look at entrepreneurship and innovation, but also on the labor force as a whole. Just as we have seen the impacts of major anchor employers leaving smaller dependent communities (such as with the decline of the print and paper industry), how does low industry diversity with fewer larger firms affect the employees and their communities today? How do large anchor employers in these industries balance the risk associated with market shocks? What does this balancing mean for the workforce?

Naturally, agriculture and manufacturing dominate the rural economy of southern Minnesota. A closer look can help us understand to what extent a market shock will affect smaller businesses and individual communities. The project is currently in the data collection and analysis phase. Data on industry density by county and employment by industry will be collected for Region Nine and its surrounding neighbors. Combining these datasets with demographic statistics including income and in/out migration, we hope to find how the region can support innovation, attract new talent, and retain its existing workforce.

Sam Sharp

Samuel has been involved with a variety of different clean and renewable energy projects over the summer, serving as a resource to communities and community organizations as they continue to pursue green and sustainable initiatives. Most notably, Samuel's efforts to help develop an application to the NREL Rural Energy Prize proved fruitful, as RNDC was awarded \$100,000 to pursue a region-wide Bioeconomy Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone certification. This certification will serve to assess the region's infrastructure and abundance of agricultural assets – corn stover, hog manure, and organic byproduct – and open the door to a global network of developers and investors interested in bringing biogas facilities to our region. Within this application, Samuel helped facilitate

partnership agreements with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Ecostrat, and the Commercial Aviation Alternative Fuels Initiative (CAAFI). Through these partnerships, Samuel and RNDC will serve to facilitate the BDO Zone process through community and stakeholder engagement, educational outreach, and the assembly of a project subcommittee responsible for maintaining the project's advancement.

RNDC has also been hosting conversations with Nature Energy – a biodigester company based in Denmark – with the intention of bringing biodigester facilities to the region. Nature Energy has expressed a serious interest in developing two or more facilities in greater Minnesota. With the combined efforts of the BDO Zone certification and Nature Energy's ambition to invest in our region, Samuel expects to be heavily involved with the facilitation and advancement of these initiatives.

Samuel has been working alongside Sabri in preparation for the Comfrey Community Resilience Planning efforts to begin. Within this plan, Samuel will be working closely with the community of Comfrey on clean and renewable energy initiatives which include solar for their wastewater treatment plant, energy audits for commercial and/or residential buildings, and offering technical assistance and support for community members interested in learning more about energy efficiency and fortifying community resilience. Through these efforts, Samuel and Sabri have consulted with a number of solar installers and energy auditors in an effort to set the stage for planning activities this Fall.

In addition to large-scale energy projects, Samuel has also been speaking with local community and non-profit organizations such as the Northcountry Foundation, Cooperative Energy Foundation, and the Blue Earth Project. These conversations range from community-funded solar gardens where community members are able to invest and take ownership of their electricity, to funding weatherization efforts for manufactured housing, and lastly, offering support for an innovative EcoMapper tool designed to improve water and soil quality within the region. Samuel has supported these organizations and their missions by listening to their needs and challenges, offering fund sourcing and grant writing assistance, and leveraging RNDC as a resource for the promotion of community outreach and educative materials.

Lastly, Samuel connected with the Great Plains Institute regarding their innovative PV-SUCCESS solar projects, in which RNDC will serve as a potential partner for education and outreach within the region upon the project's conclusion. Through this conversation, GPI also expressed a willingness to support the advancement of RNDC's SolSmart placement – currently sitting as silver – to gold or platinum.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

D. Out of State Travel Request



Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Basic Information:

Name:	Courtney Wright
Travel Reason/Event:	RLSS Conference (Revolving Loan Software Training)
Travel Destination:	Denver, CO
Date of Departure:	9/12/2023
Date of Return:	9/14/2023
Funding Source:	RLF Legacy Fund

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport		Cost
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DEN		\$ 200.00
	Description				Cost
Registration	RLSS Regional Symposium Denver				\$ 529.00
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night		Cost
Lodging	175	x	\$ 2.00	=	\$ 350.00
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem		Cost
Meals/PerDiem	2	x	\$ 75.00	=	\$ 150.00
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile		Cost
Mileage	200.00	x	\$ 0.655	=	\$ 131.00
	Description				Cost
Other					
	Description				Cost
Other					
Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request					<u>\$ 1,360.00</u>

Employee Signature: _____ Date

Executive Director Signature: _____ Date

Justification: RLSS is the loan software used by Region 9 to administer our Revolving Loan Fund program. This conference is held annually and is highly regarded by staff from other RDC's who have attended recently. It is a one day training covering both basic and higher level uses of the software. Courtney will be the main user of this software and this is the best training opportunity available for its use.

Per Region Nine Development Commission Personnel Policy Manual:

6.5 OUT OF STATE TRAVEL

It is recognized that out-of-state travel is necessary for the effective operation of RNDC. It is further recognized that active participation in national organizations, effectively influencing federal legislation, and participation in national training programs will require and warrant out-of-state travel for RNDC staff members and officials. Finally, it is recognized that as a recipient of private foundation or federal funding, RNDC, is often required to participate in the training and development opportunities afforded by the funding authority.

Notwithstanding, as a local unit of government that is accountable to the citizens of the region, out-of-state travel will be limited to those instances determined to be prudent, appropriate and essential to the delivery of RNDC programs or services. Therefore, the Board of Directors must approve the out-of-state travel of both RNDC commissioners and staff, up to and including the executive director.

To assist in the development of an annual budget, staff and RNDC commissioners are to identify the out-of-state travel necessary and expected to occur during the budget cycle. The finance director and executive director will utilize the estimates for budgetary purposes. Inclusion of anticipated travel expenses within an annual budget is not to be construed as affirmation or approval of the Board of Directors.

Requests for out-of-state travel shall be submitted to the executive director a minimum of one month before the expected date of departure. Such requests shall be made in the manner prescribed by the executive director. At a minimum, requests for out-of-state travel shall include the following information:

- Staff/commissioner(s) requesting authorization;
- Travel destination;
- Date of departure/return;
- Anticipated costs of transportation, lodging, per diems, etc.;
- Source(s) of funding; and
- Written justification/documentation of necessity.

Requests for out-of-state travel, recommended by the executive director, shall be presented to the Board of Directors for authorization, a minimum of one month before the expected departure. To take advantage of reduced fares, earlier submission is encouraged. The Board of Directors shall either approve or deny requests without delay.

In those rare instances where it is deemed logistically impossible to abide by the notice requirements of this policy, the executive director and RNDC Chair shall be authorized to approve the out-of-state travel of staff members and RNDC commissioners. Following authorization by the executive director or RNDC Chair of the Board of Directors shall be notified at their next scheduled meeting.

Terms & Abbreviations

APR – Annual Performance Reports (CEDS)	MPCA – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
ATP – Area Transportation Partnership	MSA – Metropolitan Statistical Area
AURI – Agricultural Utilization Research Institute	MSU-M – Minnesota State University, Mankato
CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy	MYLAP – MN Young America Leaders Program
COPAL – Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (Communities Organizing Latino Power and Action)	NEH – National Endowment for the Humanities
CGMC – Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities	NUBRIC – New Ulm Business Resource Innovation Center
CSSJ – Climate Smart St. James	NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Services
DEED – Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development	PI – Prosperity Initiative
DHS – Minnesota Department of Human Services	REDA – Regional Economic Development Alliance
DOE – Department of Energy	REV – Rural Entrepreneurial Venture
EDA – Economic Development Administration	RLF – Revolving Loan Fund
EDD – Economic Development District	RNAI – Region Nine Area Inc.
GAC – Gustavus Adolphus College	RNDC – Region Nine Development Commission
GIS – Geographic Information Systems	SACE – Southern Agricultural Center for Excellence
GMG – Greater Mankato Growth	SBDC – Small Business Development Center
GMDC – Greater Mankato Diversity Council	SCBDN – South Central Business Development Network
GMNP – Greater Minnesota Partnership	SCC – South Central College
HACER – Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research	SHIP – Statewide Health Improvement Partnership
HUD – Department of Housing and Urban Development	SMIF – Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
LCWM – Lake Crystal Welcome Memorial	SRTS – Safe Routes to Schools
LGU – Local Government Unit	STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program
LMI – Labor Market Information	TAC – Transportation Advisory Committee
LMI – Low-to-Moderate Income	
MADO – Minnesota Association of Development Organizations	
MAPO – Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization	
MCLA – Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs	
MDH – Minnesota Department of Health	
MnDOT – Minnesota Department of Transportation	
MnSCU – Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System	