



Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, February 12, 2025 4:30 p.m.



CONSENT AGENDA

	<u>Time</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Action</u>
1. Call to Order	4:30		
2. Roll Call – Secretary Branstad			
3. Introductions – Mark Plotz (SRSFA)			
4. Approval Consent Agenda	4:40		Action
a. Approval of December 4, 2024 Minutes		3	
b. Out-of-State Travel Request: Select USA (1) NADO Policy		6	
Conference (2) NADO Exec. Committee Fly In (1) ABLC Conference (1)			
5. Legislative Discussions & Possible Implications	4:45		
6. April Commission Agenda - Caucusing	5:00		
7. Strategic Plan Scorecard	5:10	11	
8. Information/Discussion Items	5:30		
a. Finance Director’s Hiring Update			
b. Chair’s Report – Chair Laven			
c. Executive Director’s Report – Nicole Griensewic			
9. Other Business	5:50		
a. Commissioner Updates			
b. Meeting Evaluation			Handout
10. Adjournment	6:00		Action

Secretary Branstad will be joining remotely from 314 Gulf Blvd. Indian Rocks Beach, Florida 33785

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Laven called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Schafer moved to replace agenda item 7A, Commissioner Updates, with a discussion regarding the letter Tom Loveall received. Lilienthal seconded. Motion carried.

2. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrea Boettger, Jim Branstad, Marie Dranttel, Lyle Femrite, Mike Laven, Christian Lilienthal, Steve Rohlfig, Phil Schafer, Rob Wilkening

OTHERS PRESENT: Ky Battern, Nicole Griensewic, Sarah Janovsky, Tom Loveall

There was a quorum.

3. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Rohlfig moved to approve the consent agenda. Wilkening seconded. Motion carried.

4. UPDATE ON WASECA COUNTY EDA APPLICATION FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Kristian Braekkan shared that Waseca County has received conditional approval for \$2.1 million in funding from the Federal EDA, representing a 70% funding rate, to establish a Workforce Development Center. This milestone was achieved through the collaborative efforts of community partners. An official announcement is expected in the coming weeks.

5. STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW

Dan Feehan of Playbook Strategies presented the draft strategic plan for RNDC. Commissioners and staff are encouraged to provide feedback by December 19, 2024, for review ahead of final approval at the January 8, 2025, Commission Meeting.

6. INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Finance Director's Report

Ky Battern provided an update on a significant outstanding bill to Minnesota Unemployment Insurance. It was noted that the state had incorrect address and name information for RNDC, which caused the issue. The matter has since been resolved, and will be paid.

Layne Kockelman with Abdo gave a high-level review of the audit report. The audit opinion is clear or unmodified with no instance of noncompliance.

B. Chair's Report

Chair Laven reviewed the agenda for the January Commission Meeting. The Board expressed interest in receiving more information on legislative issues and encouraged increased involvement or reporting from the RNDC Legislative Committee. He also attended several recent conferences, including NADO, NLC, and CGMC, offering valuable insights on different topics.

C. Executive Director's Report

RNDC has secured funding from the MAF to hire a full-time Food Recovery Coordinator. Additionally, RNDC has partnered with the City of Fairmont to develop an Energy and Environmental Plan. Federal EDA representative Darrin Fleener recently visited Region Nine, where RNDC focused on the flood damage in Waterville. The Federal EDA has disaster-related funding that may apply to this situation.

Nicole has joined the Mankato Free Press Advisory Board to provide input on local media coverage. Nate and Nicole met with JP Lawrence from the *Star Tribune* to discuss regional topics and explore opportunities for ongoing coverage. Nicole is recording a monthly *Talk of the Town* segment, which airs on the second Friday of each month on KTOE. Discussions are ongoing with the Aachen Region of Germany and potentially arranging a visit. Griensewic asked Board members to let her know if interested. The University of Minnesota Extension is getting involved with Rural EMS through listening sessions.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Tom Loveall

Tom Loveall has missed three consecutive Commission meetings. As a result, both he and Faribault County were notified via letter that Tom would be removed from the RNDC commission, and Faribault County was requested to appoint a new commissioner.

Lilienthal motioned to rescind the removal notice letter to Faribault County Commissioner Loveall. Schafer seconded.

Faribault County Commissioner Loveall read and addressed the letter during the board's discussion.

The motion to rescind was brought to a vote, with one vote in favor and eight votes opposed. The motion failed.

B. Meeting Evaluation

8. ADJOURNMENT

Branstad moved to adjourn. Schafer seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Region Nine Development Commission Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Name:	Nicole Griensweic
Event:	Select USA Investment Summit
Travel Destination	National Harbor, Maryland
Date of Departure:	5/10/2025
Date of Return:	5/13/2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DCA	\$ 485.96	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration	Select USA			\$ 1,150.00	McKnight
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
Lodging	3	x	\$ 276.00	\$ 828.00	McKnight
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	4	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 300.00	McKnight
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	156	x	\$ 0.67	\$ 104.52	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other	Incidentals			\$ 50.00	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other					

Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request	\$ 2,918.48
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Employee Signature: _____

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

This report reflects the expenses for flight, incidentals, and mileage for both this summit and the NADO Fly-In, which will take place immediately after this event.

Region Nine Development Commission Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Name:	Andrea Boettger
Event:	NADO Policy Conference
Travel Destination	Washington, D.C.
Date of Departure:	03.08.2025
Date of Return:	03.12.2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport	Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to DCA	\$ 397.96	Commission
	Description		Cost	Funding Source
Registration	NADO Policy Conference		\$ 510.00	Commission
	Total Nights	\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
Lodging	4	x \$ 286.00	\$ 1,144.00	Commission
	Total Days	\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Per Diem	5	x \$ 50.00	\$ 250.00	Commission
	Total Days	\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	5	x \$ 75.00	\$ 375.00	Commission
	Total Miles	\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	182	x \$ 0.67	\$ 121.94	Commission
	Description		Cost	Funding Source
Other	Incidentals		\$ 50.00	Commission
	Description		Cost	Funding Source
Other				

Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request **\$ 2,848.90**

Approved by Budget & Personnel Committee or RNDC Board of Directors on 12.04.2024.

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

Region Nine Development Commission Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Name:	Nicole Griensewic
Event:	NADO Policy Conference
Travel Destination	Washington, D.C.
Date of Departure:	03.07.2025
Date of Return:	03.13.2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DCA	\$ 665.97	General Fund
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration	NADO Policy Conference			\$ 510.00	General Fund
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
Lodging	6	x	\$ 286.00	\$ 1,716.00	General Fund
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	7	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 525.00	General Fund
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	156	x	\$ 0.67	\$ 104.52	General Fund
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other	Incidentals			\$ 50.00	General Fund
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other					

Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request	\$ 3,571.49
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Employee Signature: _____

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

Region Nine Development Commission Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Name: Nicole Griensewic
Event: NADO Fly in
Travel Destination: Washington, DC
Date of Departure: 5/13/2025
Date of Return: 5/16/2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DCA	*	
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration					
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Estimate	Funding Source
Lodging	4	x	\$ 258.00	\$ 1,032.00	General Fund
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	3	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 225.00	General Fund
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage		x	\$ 0.67		
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other					
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other					

Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request
\$ 1,257.00

Employee Signature: _____

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

* One flight, mileage and incidentals will accommodate two events, with the expense for this event included in the Select USA Travel Request for the days preceding it.

Region Nine Development Commission Out-of-State Travel Request Form

Name:	Jessica Beyer
Event:	Advanced Bioeconomy Leadership Conference (ABLC)
Travel Destination	Washington, DC
Date of Departure:	3/19/2025
Date of Return:	3/22/2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DCA	\$ 240.00	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration	ABLC			\$ 1,295.00	McKnight
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
Lodging	3	x	\$ 325.00	\$ 975.00	McKnight
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	4	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 300.00	McKnight
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	156	x	\$ 0.67	\$ 104.52	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other	Incidentals			\$ 50.00	McKnight
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Other					

Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request	\$2,889.52
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Employee Signature: _____

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

RNDC Goals (2025-2026)					
RNDC Goals		Status	Q1 25	Q2 25	Q3 25
Goal 1	Help communities individually and collectively achieve the 16 economic development aims contained in the CEDS plan by maximizing RNDC's technical assistance to local units of government within the region	On track	EXAMPLE: work has begun on most tactics outlines in the goals. Demand for grant writer is so strong, considering adding another FTE.		
Goal 2	Intensely focus RNDC's resources, human capital, and organizational influence on opportunities to make local and regional progress on keys to regional competitiveness identified in the CEDS plan – especially broadband, childcare, housing and foreign direct investment.	Significant Challenge	Ex: in addition to details below, building proposal to hold semi-annual symposium in R9 on one of the identified areas of intense interest. Biggest cause of delay is partners are not clear about what success looks like.		
Goal 3	Champion RNDC's ongoing work and achievements internally and externally to raise visibility and ensure strategic alignment of efforts	At Risk	Ex: Work under Goal 1 is taking up so much time that some of this work has been delayed.		
Goal 4	Expand upon the continuous improvement culture within RNDC	Not Started	Ex: this will be a Q2 focus.		
vv These four goals flow down to specific objectives and tactics vv					
Goals 1: Help communities individually and collectively achieve the 16 economic development aims contained in the CEDS plan by maximizing RNDC's technical assistance to local units of government within the region					
1.1	Provide support to every community that requests grant writing assistance and assertively encourage more communities to apply for specific funding opportunities	On track	EXAMPLE: surveyed 35 communities and wrote 10 grants requested; first quarter funding availability newsletter went out on time.		
1.2	Deliver strategic and/or comprehensive planning support that meets the varied needs of communities within the region and provides a foundation for funding attainment	On track	EXAMPLE: Provided two trainings. Drafting has begun on comp planning handbook. Cowrote 6 strategic plans with the following communities:		
1.3	Conduct regional and/or local studies that provide foundational evidence and are supportive of local applications to receive state and federal funding	On track	EXAMPLE: Completed 5 studies with the following communities, which is 50% of annual goal. 3 of 5 studies have already been used in grant applications. Awaiting grant application results.		
1.4	Update the CEDS plan in accordance with US EDA requirement	On track	Example: reviewed guidance from EDA on how CEDS requirements will change. Awaiting publication in federal register.		
Goal 2: Intensely focus RNDC's resources, human capital, and organizational influence on opportunities to make local and regional progress on keys to regional competitiveness identified in the CEDS plan – especially broadband, childcare, housing and foreign direct investment.					
2.1	Utilize both commissioner and staff time to advocate at the state and federal level for public policies and funding to support RNDC's needs	On track	EXAMPLE: XX commissioners testified during the legislative session		
2.2	Connect communities with resources, expertise, and cross-sector / foreign partnerships in these areas to solve challenges	Significant Challenge	EXAMPLE: do to staffing shortfall, have prioritized other goals		
2.3	Direct RNDC resources (staff time, funding, authorities) toward finding solutions to challenges communities face in these areas and other emerging areas of need.	Not Started	EXAMPLE: Q2 priority		
Goal 3: Champion RNDC's ongoing work and achievements internally and externally to raise visibility and ensure strategic alignment of efforts					
3.1	Expand communications strategy to "report back" regularly on past initiatives, trips, financial commitments and other significant RNDC resource uses	At Risk	Example: Reports delayed to Q2		
3.2	Promote RNDC's core message and work locally, nationally and internationally with an eye toward developing partnerships that deliver tangible outcomes	Not Started	Example: Biannual requirement		
3.3	Define the value RNDC provides and communicate that message clearly and consistently.	At Risk	Example: Commissioner subcommittee to further define		
Goal 4: Expand upon the continuous improvement culture within RNDC					
4.1	Establish standardized annual review process for Executive Director	Not Started	Example: Q3work to begin		
4.2	Create implementation plans & staff assignments for the strategic plan and CEDS plan as well as a regular reporting schedule to the board. (Implementation plans should align with staff goals & annual review process)	Not Started	Example: Q3work to begin		
4.3	Build an RNDC project management process and apply it consistently	Not Started	Example: Q3work to begin		
4.4	Offer staff professional development opportunities specific to continuous improvement in their role and/or focus areas of this plan. Ensure professional development includes technical education as well as development of skills to further enhance the RNDC culture, organizational development and to meet future needs.	Not Started	Example: Q3work to begin		
4.5	Review organizational governance, by-laws and policies as they relate to leadership, succession planning, code of conduct, for the purposes of risk mitigation, travel, transparency, and accountability.	Not Started	Example: Q3work to begin		

A St. Peter community hub is LEDing the way

A small project can have a brilliant impact. Take the [River of Life Lutheran Church](#) in St. Peter, Minnesota, for example. With the help of a [CERTs Seed Grant](#), they upgraded the lighting in their “Friends Building” to energy-efficient LEDs. Now, this vital community hub, home to several local organizations, is shining brighter — literally and figuratively. We spoke with church leadership to learn more about the project’s impact.

A light in the community

Run by River of Life Lutheran Church, the Friends Building in St. Peter is a community beacon. The space houses multiple non-profit organizations, including the [St. Peter Area Food Shelf](#), a weekend children's food program, an at-risk youth program, Mankato Rehabilitation Center, a free community clinic, Al-Anon and AA meetings, and church fellowship groups.

With help from the seed grant, River of Life updated all the lighting fixtures from fluorescent to LED throughout the main floor of the building. Jake Anderson, a board member closely involved with the project, says the upgrade is already making a difference in how people experience the Friends Building. Noting that in particular, the St. Peter Area Food Shelf space.

In addition to much needed additional lighting, church leadership say the project impact reaches even further.

“The Friends Building is donation funded,” explains Anderson. “So by decreasing the cost of energy we can invest that money back into the programs we house in our facility.”

Trusting the process

“This project has been a great learning experience for us,” says Jake Anderson. “We as an organization have learned a great deal about how grants work and the impacts they have on our community.”

Anderson says his advice to others taking on similar upgrades is to trust the process!

“If we had advice to give to those trying to replicate this project, it would be to stay with it and trust the process,” says Jake Anderson. “It's worth it!”

CERTs is inspired by the St. Peter community's commitment to supporting one another and proud to be a partner in that effort. Anderson says the appreciation is mutual.

“This project has been a blessing to us and our community.”



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

CERTs Grant Region: West Central

Clean Energy Focus: Energy Efficiency - LED Lighting Upgrade

West Central CERTs Grant: \$340

Energy Savings: 13,093 kWh/year

Monetary Savings: \$1,621/year

People Reached and Involved: 1,216 youth and adults

[EXPLORE CERTS SEED GRANTS](#)

[Link to the Article](#)

and improving facilities that serve as critical gathering spaces in Comfrey. “This type of project has long-term benefits,” said Mayor Richter. “We are already noticing the savings on our electric bill.”

The upgrade is just one step in [Comfrey's Climate Resilience Plan](#). The plan was developed by a 10-member committee of local residents after the flooding of 2023. It outlines strategies to address environmental challenges, prepare for extreme weather events, reduce energy consumption, and ensure a sustainable future for the community.

“For a small town like Comfrey, an LED lighting upgrade can make a big impact on energy cost savings,” says Southwest CERT Regional Coordinator, Nadya Bucklin. “This opens up the opportunity to use that money for other necessary expenses.”

She continues, “It may seem like a modest step, but it’s a perfect example of how communities can adapt, innovate, and thrive in the face of challenges.”

Mayor Richter agrees. “Our community’s tight-knit bond and willingness to support one another define the concept of resilience and the capability to bounce back from disaster. Yet, Comfrey remains vulnerable to future climate disasters yet to occur. With an aging population and limited resources, we must ensure the resilience of the community for future generations.”



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

CERTs Grant Region: Southwest

Clean Energy Focus: Energy Efficiency with LED Lighting Upgrade

CERTs Grants Amount: \$5,500

Energy Savings Each Year: 45405 kWh

Money Saved Each Year: \$5,621

Other Funds Leveraged: City of Comfrey, Brown County Rural Electric Association

[EXPLORE CERTS SEED GRANTS](#)

City of Comfrey defies disaster and shines a light on resilience

In southwest Minnesota, the City of Comfrey is using past hardships to fuel the future. In 2024, the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) awarded the city a [CERTs Seed Grant](#) for lighting upgrades. As a result, the ceilings in the Comfrey post office, community center, city offices, and firehall, all have new, energy efficient LEDs. The project meant swapping out more than 525 fluorescent bulbs – that’s more bulbs than residents in the city!

In fact, Comfrey’s population is 392 people and the town covers less than a square mile of land on the border of Brown and Cottonwood Counties. But what Comfrey lacks in size, it makes up for in legacy. The recent improvements are just the latest chapter in Comfrey’s story of resilience and overcoming challenges.

Defying Disaster

In the spring of 2023, Comfrey was struck by a bout of serious flooding. The city dealt with standing water inhibiting major roadways, flooding basements, and thousands of dollars in damages to homes and businesses. The calamity was severe.

The event also brought back memories of another tragedy in the town’s history, a devastating tornado that swept through in 1998.

“A majority of our homes, businesses, and the infrastructure were wiped out in that tornado. But not the water tower!” recalls Tammy Kelly, Comfrey’s city clerk and treasurer. “It was built in 1906.”

Despite being over 90 years old at the time, the town’s water tower managed to survive the 1998 storm. Photos and newspaper clippings from the event still hang in Comfrey’s city hall. The aftermath images show the city in shambles; collapsed homes and debris riddled streets. Amidst the ruin, the tower stands strong and defiant, a beacon of Comfrey’s resilience.

“Today it’s the second oldest water tower in Minnesota, and it’s still operating!” says Kelly. “That’s something that we’re proud of here.”

While both disasters linger in the town’s collective memory, so does the community response. In 1998 and again in 2023, Comfrey residents united to support one another. Like when neighbors pitched in to haul sandbags and pump water from basements to combat flooding. These moments illuminate the heart of the community. Mayor Gary Richter says it’s Comfrey’s heart that will lead the city forward.

A Spotlight on Resilience

In the vein of looking to tomorrow, in 2023, Comfrey chose to pursue the municipal lighting upgrade with help from the CERTs Seed Grant. The results are already making a difference

STAFF UPDATES | February 2025

Nicole Griensewic

The team has done a fabulous job keeping projects moving forward as worked to onboard our two new positions. Mark Plotz started with RNDC on January 13th as a Transportation Planner for the Safe Roads and Streets for All US DOT grant. We have extended an offer to a candidate for the Food Recovery Coordinator position pending successful background check. Their first day will be February 24th. The Finance Director position is the last position open to fill. There have been only five applicants, and the position has been posted for over a month. Nicole and Jessica are actively working to keep the process moving forward while still ensuring it is promoted for optimal exposure. Giselle Lo, the Connection Corps member accepted a full-time position and ended her AmeriCorps term early. Follow up will occur regarding next steps with the program, as it was only midway through the term.

Conversations continue with the Aachen region hosting an RNDC Delegation, potentially the last week of June. Reminding any interested commissioners to contact Nicole if interested.

Nicole has been extra active with the NADO Executive Committee as the Trump Administration rolls out new Executive Orders. Programs that RNDC currently has that could be negatively impacted include US DOT's *Safe Roads and Streets for All*; USDA's Regional Food Business Centers; AmeriCorps *Green Corps* program; EDA grants, and others. Time will be allocated on the Board Agenda to discuss any implications and/or impacts, as the one week pause on implementation will be done by then. Through RNDC's partnership with SCSC and its Wellness Program, the team was able to spend ½ day out in the region in Mapleton learning everything about curling. It was a fun half day for the team to enjoy some comradery and a meal together afterwards.

Alejandra Bejarano

Alejandra has been working closely with Mercedes to complete the regional employer toolkit, designed to support regional employers interested in hiring and retaining global talent. As part of this work, a launch event will be held on February 13th, with over 70 registrants at this point. The event will include a presentation on the regional report created by Alejandra and Mercedes, as well as a panel featuring local college and employer partners. Alejandra has been working on personal outreach to local employers, chambers of commerce, DEED, and other workforce partners in the region.

The integrated strategic economic and housing development study for the City of Springfield has officially kicked off. Alejandra is leading the strategic economic development portion of the project. Alejandra and Kristian have met with the local EDA to design and define stakeholder outreach for the plan, develop a vision statement for the city, and establish key outcomes and expectations for the project.

Alejandra was invited to join the Talent Hub Committee as part of the Transforming Tomorrow Together initiative. This committee, led by community, education, and industry partners, aims to develop a Talent Hub for Mankato and the surrounding region. The group will be meeting over the next year to achieve key goals around talent attraction and retention.

RNDC is partnering with Greater Mankato Growth (GMG) to host a regional workforce summit. As part of this initiative, Alejandra met with Brittany Bowman and Ryan Vesey from GMG to finalize the event agenda, coordinate event logistics, and organize exhibitor booths for the day of the event. RNDC will also work on inviting city and county stakeholders to the summit.

Last year, Alejandra was selected to be part of the Humphrey Public Policy Fellows Program through the University of Minnesota. As part of this leadership experience, she will be traveling to Washington, D.C., to meet with and learn from state and national elected officials. Additionally, Alejandra will present at an upcoming staff meeting to share key learnings and insights from the program.

Jessica Beyer

Throughout the last month, Jessica has continued her work in supporting and providing leadership guidance and technical assistance to the team on several projects/initiatives that team members have touched on in this report. Some of this work includes preparations for the Launch event on February 13, quarry redevelopment conversations, regional broadband discussions, and participation in the biodigester tour in Le Sueur to name a few items. Jessica has made progress on some key items related to organizational development and her work through the Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership.

With the Finance Director position being vacant, Jessica has been working closely with Jazmine Flores who is handling day to day operations to keep the organization moving forward with accounts receivable/payable components, payroll, and many other finance/benefits- related tasks. Given the timing of the year with several reports and year-end materials due – Jessica has been helping cover a portion of the responsibilities in addition to coordinating efforts with Mary Bogie who is currently working limited hours on contract to provide higher level accounting and reporting expertise that is needed to get the organization through the transition. Jessica has also been focused on managing the interview process for the Finance Director position. Interviews started on February 4.

Part of Jessica's role has also included assisting with Mark's onboarding as the Road Safety Transportation Planner and with overseeing the interview and hiring process for the Food Recovery Coordinator position, which is now filled.

Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP) work has been advancing with a key meeting taking place in St. Cloud among University of Minnesota officials and the three Regional Development Organization partners across the State. Jessica and Sam represented RNDC. In

correlation with that meeting, Jessica has been working with an internal RNDC group including Sam, Lisa, and Sabri to further develop our MCAP workplan based on the contract and overarching objectives of the partnership.

Legislative connections, outreach, visibility, and relationship building also continues to be a priority and Jessica has participated in meetings with Nicole to represent the organization and strategize partnerships for RNDC. Also, individually, this past month, she set aside time to make legislative connections that will help educate and inform officials on RNDC's work and specific projects within districts.

Kristian Braekkan

Kristian finalized an economic impact study on behalf of Holtmeier Construction Inc. and Mankato Area Mountain Bikers (MAMB) to identify the economic impact of a proposed redevelopment of more than 90 acres of former limestone mines in Lime Township into mountain bike trails, along with rock climbing areas, an expansive RV campground and a series of quarry ponds featuring a wakeboarding park. The study focuses on the impact of mountain bike trails as this non-commercial component will be handed over to MAMB and the general public for future use. Other project components are of a commercial nature and are expected to yield additional economic benefits. Holtmeier is planning for the free public amenities (i.e., mountain bike trails) to be developed through sponsorships and will use the impact study to solicit corporate sponsors. A professional trail planner organization — Pathfinder Trails — has been onsite and will design the trail system in consultation with the founder of the highly regarded mine reclamation project known as Redhead Mountain Bike Park in Chisholm, MN.

Kristian is also working on a housing study for the City of Springfield to assess current and future housing needs, challenges, and trends within the community through the identification of gaps in housing supply and affordability while evaluating the quality and condition of existing housing and analyze demographic changes impacting housing demand. The study will provide data-driven insights to inform local policymakers, developers, and community stakeholders in making decisions that support sustainable, affordable, and housing solutions for Springfield's residents. The study is conducted in partnership with Alejandra who is leading the strategic economic development planning with the city. Partial funding has been provided by SMIF for these studies.

Additionally, Kristian is currently in the process of conducting in depth interviews with Rural Entrepreneurship Venture (REV) committee members from across the twenty county SMIF region in partnership with Tim Penny and Pam Bishop from SMIF to develop an understanding of how the REV program supports and initiates entrepreneurial activities in the various communities, identify best practices and models for successful implementation and replication, document needs and opportunities for future programming, discuss opportunities in the community, and how they align with county-wide assessments of economic development. Aaron is presenting the findings on an

aggregate level and will help Kristian articulate recommendations to SMIF and RNDC on how to strengthen support for rural entrepreneurship and economic development in the larger region.

Finally, Aaron and Kristian have assisted the City of Waseca in preparing for a joint strategic economic development project that kicks off in March. Aaron has been leading these efforts in helping the city and county better understand the economic landscape through cluster analysis, presentation of private sector employment, and other determinants of community and economic development needs and opportunities.

Lisa Callahan

Lisa, along with Sam Sharp, provided community readiness and outreach materials to many communities within Region Nine. These materials included improvement opportunities, resources, and a survey. Lisa also developed youth outreach materials focusing on post-high school opportunities, which she distributed to many schools.

She engaged in meetings with the City of New Ulm and New Ulm Public Utilities as they explored anaerobic digestion development. She presented at both the City of Butterfield and the City of Truman's City Council meetings to offer support and services and to provide an overview of current opportunities. We outlined resilience improvement opportunities and mentioned various grants available, such as the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Small Community Planning Grant and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant. Lisa has been supporting MPCA grant planning initiatives, including the Local Action Climate Grant for the Children's Museum in Mankato and for the City of New Ulm.

She connected with the City of Springfield, providing information about the University of Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP), which offers critical resources and training to help communities respond to extreme weather and changing climate conditions to prepare for the future. She also connected with the City of Gaylord and continues to look for ways to assist Gaylord with economic growth initiatives. Lastly, she met with the City of St. James to discuss school outreach opportunities and plan to provide information at St. James High School's Career Day event.

Lisa organized a tour of HomeTown BioEnergy in Le Sueur. The plant produces renewable energy by converting agricultural and food processing waste into biogas, which is then upgraded to renewable natural gas. Additionally, the facility produces nutrient-rich by-products that are sold back to local farmers as fertilizer. Tour participants had the opportunity to see how this process works.

Finally, Lisa is part of the team at Region Nine working on the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program. Currently, the team is working with the City of Fairmont and the City of St. James. There are six other communities that can take advantage of the EECBG program. These funds can be used for planning energy efficiency initiatives, such as developing a climate resilience plan. There are many opportunities under the EECBG program.

Sabri Fair

Sabri's grant writing secured a \$123,000 grant (90% of system cost) to install a 57.6 kw solar array at Comfrey's Wastewater Treatment Plant. This system will cover ~125% of the sites' annual electricity use and will result in total electricity savings of ~\$220,000 over the system's 30-year life span or roughly \$7,000 in annual energy savings.

With Sabri's grant writing support, the City of Eagle Lake was encouraged to submit a full application for the Solar on Public Buildings grant through the MN Dept of Commerce. The full application which is due May 5th will require releasing an RFP and having solar installers present to the city council to find the right installer. Eagle Lake is eligible for a 70% grant to cover systems at both their City Hall and Public Works Building.

Sabri and Sam have continued working with the City of Fairmont in preparation for their Energy and Environmental Resilience Plan. The goal is to have the first meeting at the end of February.

Sabri hosted another farm transition webinar as part of the Farmland Access Hub on January 15th. The webinar featured MDA's Farmland Access Coordinator, Jim Molenaar and highlighted the importance of planning early and resources landowners can access to navigate the process. There were 40 attendees.

Sabri received \$50,000 from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation to develop a Grow-A-Farmer grant to help local farmers recover from last year's extreme weather and make small investments to increase the sustainability and competitiveness of their businesses. He has worked with Nate to develop the application form and will start taking applications soon.

Sabri has continued the planning process for a permanent Mankato Farmers' Market location. He plans to have a draft plan by the end of February so the committee can begin outreach to possible host partners in the community.

Sabri has continued collaborating with the Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) on outreach for the Energy Improvements in Rural Areas Concept Paper they plan to submit at the end of February.

Jazmine Flores

Jazmine Flores has been actively engaged in training Mary, the consultant, on payroll processing to help alleviate some of the workload. She has consistently managed accounts payable on a biweekly basis and successfully processed the EDA RLF report to the EDA by the January 30 deadline.

In collaboration with various banks, Jazmine has facilitated necessary changes to bank account authorized signers and configured online banking access. She has also handled daily deposits across

multiple banks. Additionally, she ensured the timely mailing of year-end RLF interest statements to clients, processed 1099s, reconciled RLF payments, and submitted new payments to RLF clients.

Jazmine provided support to Sabri by assisting with invoice retrieval for reporting and helped Joel gather financial reports for his reporting needs. She met with Claire from the loan committee to discuss RLF matters and engaged with Mike Hahn from the SBDC to explore potential partnership

Her work also included a site visit to Little Bees and attendance at a luncheon in Bloomington hosted by Secured Finance Minnesota, further expanding her professional network.

Nathan George

Nate worked with Alejandra and Mercedes on the Global Talent Toolkit, handouts, event, and webpage. He designed, typeset, and edited the documents as well as designed the webpage and administered the launch event which will take place February 13th. He also communicated the event with media throughout the region which led to an interview with Lisa Kaye on KTOE's Talk of the Town program where he and Alejandra will discuss the event and program.

Nate has been working with Sarah to organize and communicate with applicants for the Road Safety Transportation Planner, Regional Food Recovery Planner, and Finance Director positions. He has also been administering the promotion of these positions.

Nate participated in the virtual seminar "Thriving at Work: A Team-Based Approach to Health and Wellness. The seminar highlighted ways to engage the workforce in team-building that doesn't lower workplace efficiency. One idea is to have "active" meetings that involve holding staff meetings on a walking trail. The goal is to increase job satisfaction, improve mental health, lower burnout, and promote the organization's culture.

Nate has also been preparing for Local Foods Month with Sabri. Sabri and Nate meet with MBFFA program partners about the budget and scope of the 2025 event. They also discussed ways to involve more communities in the future. This year the event will be expanded to the month of August.

Nate created two social media ad campaigns for the February 13th Global Workforce Event and the February 19th Rural EMS Listening Session. He optimized the campaigns to be highly focused on the intended audience to increase the performance of the ads. He has been able to maximize impressions while keeping the advertising costs low.

Nate and Nicole had their first interview session with True Façade which will be part of a video highlighting the work of RND. Nate helped facilitate everyone's schedule and provided the talking points for the interview. This was the first session that will be the framework of the rest of the video.

Joel Hanif

After a delay to the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown School District's Safe Routes to School plan from the news of the closure of their Morristown school and move to house all grades in Waterville, Joel's work on that plan has resumed. He is working on draft revisions with the intent to deliver a revised

draft to the planning team by February 14 and a presentation to the Waterville City Council at their March meeting.

Joel has been meeting regularly with UofM Extension, Commissioner Dave Borchert, and Mark Griffith of South Central Minnesota EMS to plan a follow-up listening session to November's Rural EMS listening session in Eagle Lake. The listening session will be virtual and will take place on February 19 at 1:00pm.

Along with Alejandra and Nate, Joel met with the Tri-County Solid Waste director Al Christensen to discuss first steps and timelines in Region Nine's work on the Tri-County Solid Waste Management Plan. Work will commence on that plan once staff receives the first batch of data and other information from Tri-County Solid Waste.

Joel participated in a MnDOT functional classification workshop in January to learn more about the functional classification process, including steps in identifying and documenting road classification updates, tools and resources for classification review, and RDO roles in the process.

Joel has been working with co-chair Mallory Jarvi of West Central Initiative Foundation and Bryan McCoy, MnDOT's new RDO coordinator, on organizing the next Minnesota RDO planners meeting, which will take place virtually on February 25 and 26 with speakers on various topics like Safe Routes to School (in Minnesota and other states), the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program (NEVI), and the Carbon Reduction Program. This will be Joel's final meeting as co-chair as his 2-year term is concluding.

Joel hosted a TAC meeting on February 7 where he introduced Region Nine's newest planner, Mark Plotz, and alongside Mark, discussed the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) planning grant that Mark will be leading over the next 3 years. Joel also discussed Surface Transportation Program (STP) Rural and Small Urban applications within the region and shared these applications with the TAC so that they could score them on regional significance, which figures into their final scoring at the ATP level where funding is ultimately decided.

Sarah Janovsky

Sarah continues to support the team with ongoing responsibilities. Recently, she has been focused on scheduling interviews for the Food Recovery Coordinator and Finance Director positions, as well as managing technology clean-up.

In support of staff wellness, development, and retention, Sarah has arranged for guest presenters to speak at upcoming staff meetings. Hannah Keltgen from SCSC's Wellness Program will provide insights into available benefits that employees may not yet be aware of. Dan Weir will present on our insurance plan, and Marlo Petersen will share information about Medical Spending Accounts

available to employees. These presentations will help staff better understand the benefits available to them through RNDC.

Aaron Pacheco

Aaron is currently working on a strategic planning project with the City and County of Waseca. Analyzing labor shed data for Waseca County and its cities, key findings reveal that Waseca is the only city where a significant portion of residents both live and work locally, while in contrast, the surrounding county has a high rate of out-commuting. By combining this data with insights from the area's largest private employers, Aaron has highlighted the county's strengths in both local and outside traded sectors, while in collaboration with Kristian Braekkan using location quotients (which measure an industry's return on investment by area), they have helped Waseca understand how the city compares to regional and state averages.

One of the key takeaways from his research is the clustering of industries and the strong relationship between these clusters and rural population centers. To further address the specific needs of the City of Waseca, Aaron has worked directly with the city to refine the focus and analyze the regional relationship between employment and the manufacturing sector. This work, along with the broader project, has sparked a joint strategic economic initiative set to begin in the spring.

Aaron, in collaboration with Kristian Braekkan, is also partnering with the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) on its Rural Entrepreneurial Venture (REV) program, which aims to foster entrepreneurship and innovation in rural communities. While Kristian conducts interviews with program members, Aaron is responsible for coding and analyzing the qualitative interview data to identify opportunities for encouraging innovation in the region. Although the project is still in its early stages, these initial efforts are focused on providing recommendations for best practices in developing a rural entrepreneurial ecosystem. Moving forward, the project will combine the qualitative interview results with quantitative data to create a comprehensive analysis that will be shared with SMIF and RNDC. This will include both regional insights and more localized community-level findings.

Mark Plotz

Mark reported to work on Monday, January 13, and began working on the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant. The grant will span three years and a comprehensive safety action plan for each county will be developed. It is expected that approximately three action plans will be completed for each year of the grant. Each action plan will be the product of extensive outreach to the general public, and more focused engagement of groups that include elected officials, transportation professionals, law enforcement, and any particular user groups that are overrepresented in crash data. Each county's plan will be designed to plug & play – so to speak – with MnDOT District 7's funding streams. At the conclusion of the grant, an overarching regional safety strategy will be delivered which knits together the county plans and sets performance measures for reducing serious crashes.

It is anticipated that the crash data collection will reveal “hotspots” where serious crashes are concentrated. As such, Mark will be working with Joel to identify a process for expediting “fixes” rather than relying upon the usual four-year project funding cycle. Additionally, it is hoped that a proactive process can be established for reviewing road construction detours and applying crash reduction countermeasures before problems emerge. Examples of proactive safety steps might include enhanced enforcement, more frequent crash data review, removing vegetation, and additional signage. A regional road safety summit is also in the works for late summer 2024.

For this grant Mark will be building detailed GIS maps for each of the Region Nine counties -- an effort he will enjoy and one that he expects will benefit other Region Nine programs. Other ways he will be contributing to the organization include assisting Joel with Region Nine’s Technical Advisory Committee, adding expertise gained as an owner of a small retail business, and thanks to his St. Peter to Mankato bike commute, Mark will make the organization a formidable player in any Bike Month mileage challenge.

Sam Sharp

Samuel and Lisa successfully developed and submitted two separate applications for the MPCA Local Climate Action Grants. The first project involved weatherization and energy efficiency support for the disadvantaged census tract in New Ulm. This project features several partners – the City of New Ulm, New Ulm Public Utilities (NUPU), Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC), Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs), and RNDC. If awarded, this funding will be used to expand on the existing Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) between NUPU and MVAC, connecting more households to energy efficiency support. Specific activities will include energy audits, appliance upgrades, and deep energy retrofits. The second application was submitted on behalf of the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota (CMSM). Like the New Ulm project, this focuses on energy efficiency improvements. The CMSM is in the process of a green expansion project, serving to further their efforts in youth and community education. If awarded, this project will alleviate lofty energy costs and optimize their building’s energy efficiency through upgrades recommended in a previous energy audit.

Samuel and Sabri applied to the MPCA’s Small Communities Planning Grants to assist the City of Skyline with unresolved stormwater and flooding concerns. The project scope focuses on alternative and long-lasting solutions to drive community engagement and mitigate flooding impacts.

Samuel and Lisa have held several conversations with the City of New Ulm centered around the potential for an anaerobic digestion (AD) system, utilizing the abundance of organic waste from various food manufacturers in the city. The next step will be to convene these producers and analyze the inputs required for project advancement. Samuel and Lisa have already secured a commitment from AURI to assist in this process.

Samuel has been supporting Lisa in her outreach efforts to become more connected with the region. Recently, they have attended city council meetings for Butterfield and Truman, with several others being coordinated in the months ahead. These meetings not only fortify relationships with Region Nine, they also serve to help connect communities with resources for funding opportunities.

Terms & Abbreviations

ACC – American Connection Corp	MAPO – Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization
APPR – Annual Performance Progress Report (CEDS)	MCLA – Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs
ATP – Area Transportation Partnership	MDH – Minnesota Department of Health
AURI – Agricultural Utilization Research Institute	MPCA – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
BDO – Bioeconomy Development Opportunity	MSA – Metropolitan Statistical Area
CRP – Carbon Reduction Program	MSU-M – Minnesota State University, Mankato
CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy	MYLAP – MN Young American Leaders Program
COPAL – Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (Communities Organizing Latino Power and Action)	NEA – National Endowment for the Arts
CGMC – Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities	NEH – National Endowment for the Humanities
CPRG – Climate Pollution Reduction Grant	NUBRIC – New Ulm Business Resource Innovation Center
CSET – College of Science, Engineering & Technology	NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Services
CSM – Climate Smart Municipalities	PI - Prosperity Initiative
CSSJ – Climate Smart St. James	PROTECT – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation
CTS – Center for Transportation Studies	REDA – Regional Economic Development Alliance
DEED – Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development	REV – Rural Entrepreneurial Venture
DOE – Department of Energy	RLF – Revolving Loan Fund
EDA – Economic Development Administration	RNAI – Region Nine Area Inc.
EDD – Economic Development District	RNDC – Region Nine Development Commission
EECBG - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant	SACE – Southern Agricultural Center for Excellence
GAC – Gustavus Adolphus College	SAF – Sustainable Aviation Fuel
GIS – Geographic Information Systems	SBDC – Small Business Development Center
GMG – Greater Mankato Growth	SCC – South Central College
GMNP – Greater Minnesota Partnership	SCSC – South Central Service Cooperative
HACER – Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research	SHIP – Statewide Health Improvement Partnership
IF – Initiative Foundation	SMIF – Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
LGU – Local Government Unit	SRTS – Safe Routes to Schools
LMI – Labor Market Information	SS4A – Safe Streets for All
LMI – Low-to-Moderate Income	STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program
MADO – Minnesota Association of Development Organizations	TAC – Transportation Advisory Committee
MAPCED - Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers	WCI – West-Central Initiative
	TZD – Toward Zero Deaths