



Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, August 13, 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. Approval of Agenda	4:32		Action
4. Approval Consent Agenda	4:33	3	Action
a. Approval of May 14, 2025, Minutes			
b. Financials			
5. Action Items	4:40	9	Action
a. Out-of-State Travel Request – NADO Exec. Committee Fly-In (Griensewic- Revised)			
b. Out-of-State Travel Request – NADO ATC (Griensewic)			
c. Out-of-State Travel Request – NADO ATC (Tom Polich)			
6. Information/Discussion Items	4:45		
a. EDA & Additional Grant/Funding Opportunities Overview & Discussion		12	
b. Finance Director's Report – Stephanie Hilpipre		13	
c. Chair's Report – Chair Laven			
1. Annual Meeting Date Recommended Change: June 10 to June 17			
d. Executive Director's Report – Nicole Griensewic			
1. Community Outreach Efforts Update – Samuel Sharp		22	
2. RFBC Update & Local Foods Month Presentation – Sabri Fair		34	
3. NADO Impact Award		35	
7. Other Business	5:45		
a. Commissioner Updates			
b. Meeting Evaluation			Handout
8. Adjournment	6:00		Action

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrea Boettger, Jim Branstad, Marie Dranttel, Mike Laven, Tom Loveall, Christian Lilienthal, Patty O'Connor, Steve Rohlffing, Phil Schafer, Rob Wilkening

OTHERS PRESENT: Jessica Beyer, Joel Hanif, Sarah Janovsky, Shanon Nowell (virtual)

There was a quorum.

3. COMMITTEE MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS

Patty O'Connor is a newly appointed member of the Board of Directors representing Blue Earth County. Shanon Nowell joined the meeting remotely and is serving as the Chair of the Budget and Personnel Committee.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Laven requested the addition of an action, "Commissioner Absence Discussion," under the Chair's Report for this evening's meeting, referencing a letter he received and distributed to the board in advance.

Boettger moved to approve the agenda. Schafer seconded. Motion carried.

5. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

Lilienthal moved to approve the consent agenda. Rohlffing seconded. Motion carried.

6. APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION 2025-02 RDC TRANSPORTATION PLANNING GRANT

RNDC Transportation Planner, Joel Hanif, presented draft contracts related to a two-year planning grant in partnership with MnDOT District 7. This grant supports RNDC's involvement in both regional and statewide transportation planning. The contract totals \$150,000 over two years, with the current year's

portion at \$75,000 due to the state's biennial funding structure. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) reviewed and recommended the work plan for approval.

The work plan outlines activities such as ATP coordination, TAC administration, transportation planner convenings, statewide and regional planning efforts (including Safe Routes to School and Zero Deaths initiatives), and limited conference attendance (capped at 2%). Matching funds are provided through in-kind staff time. RNDC continues to prioritize Safe Routes to School planning, with efforts underway to identify communities in need of plan updates or first-time planning.

Branstad moved to approve Resolution 2025-02 RDC Transportation Planning Grant. Loveall seconded. Motion carried.

7. RNDC DELEGATION TO AACHEN, GERMANY OVERVIEW

Vice Chair Boettger provided an overview of the AGIT Aachen, Germany, delegation that visited Region Nine last fall, as well as a preview of the upcoming Region Nine delegation to Aachen this June. She noted that the upcoming visit will serve as a continuation of the previous exchange and will include key stakeholders focused on issues of mutual interest and concern to both regions. The international partnership has been supported in part by funding from the McKnight Foundation, which enabled Region Nine to host and participate in these exchanges.

The partnership aims to foster cross-cultural collaboration, prioritizing climate resilience and clean energy, while also advancing regional development and workforce development. During the German delegation's visit to Minnesota, they met with elected officials, educators, planners, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders to learn about local innovations in flood mitigation, sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), and circular building materials.

The upcoming June visit will focus on continued dialogue around renewable energy, clean technologies, and regional workforce strategies, with a strong emphasis on student internship exchanges between universities. Outcomes of the previous exchanges include successful student placements at public utilities in New Ulm, deeper university partnerships (such as with the University of Münster and Minnesota State University, Mankato), and ongoing efforts to connect skilled graduates with rural career opportunities. This next phase of the partnership aims to further develop those initiatives while learning from Germany's regional development strategies focused on resiliency.

8. OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUEST APPROVALS

Tonight's agenda includes two travel requests requiring approval: one for the NADO Summer Board Meeting and one for the Aachen, Germany Delegation.

Airfare for the Germany trip was booked at economy rates, with expenses covered by McKnight Foundation funds. A concern was raised regarding the timeliness of the travel request, as it was submitted less than a month in advance and may conflict with an existing budget and personnel matter. Members discussed the importance of aligning future travel requests with the annual budgeting process.

It was also noted that while not all trips are included in the original budget, the budget may be amended as needed to accommodate such requests.

O'Connor moved to approve the out-of-state Travel Request for the NADO Summer Board Meeting. Wilkening seconded. Motion carried.

Branstad moved to approve the out-of-state Travel Requests for the Aachen, Germany, Delegation. Dranttel seconded. Motion carried.

9. Finance Areas of Work Overview & Budget Update/Discussion

Jessica Beyer noted the current period is especially busy with fiscal year-end tasks, budgeting, and preparations for the audit. Dranttel, as Treasurer, has been supporting these efforts, working with outside firms like Burkhardt & Burkhardt to ensure clean audits and financial readiness. The conversation highlighted that although Region Nine has saved money by not currently paying a Finance Director, those funds are being strategically used to contract out essential audit preparation tasks, helping reduce long-term costs.

Second-round interviews for the Finance Director are scheduled for Friday, May 16, 2025. Questions were raised about the financial system in place, which was described as outdated and difficult, particularly the grant management software. The team acknowledged the need to eventually replace it with something more modern, possibly through a joint effort with other Regional Development Organizations (RDOs). However, this will only move forward once a new director is on board and up to speed.

The budget process is underway with team meetings and strategic adjustments, including reductions in contracted positions like AmeriCorps and Green Corps. They're watching grant funding closely, noting both successful awards and recent denials. The Budget & Personnel Committee meets on June 3rd to review and refine budget options before the June 18th annual meeting. Board members expressed concern over keeping levy increases minimal—potentially proposing 1%, 1.5%, or 2% options—given pressure on local governments due to reduced federal aid, inflation, and rising health insurance costs. There was consensus that Region Nine must remain fiscally conservative, adaptable to funding uncertainties, and transparent in its strategy moving forward.

10. Information/Discussion Items

a. Chair's Report – Chair Laven

1. Resolution 2025-03 Proposed FY26 Meeting Dates

The board discussed the proposed meeting dates and agreed to schedule an additional meeting on March 11, 2026, despite potential overlaps with LMC, AMC, and other events. It was noted that members could participate virtually, or the meeting could be canceled if deemed unnecessary, but having it scheduled is beneficial in preparation for the April Commission meeting.

Wilkening proposed amending the FY26 Meeting Dates to include an additional Board of Directors meeting on March 11, 2026, and to submit the revised resolution to the full commission for approval. Loveall seconded the motion. Motion carried.

2. Commission Nominating Process & Officer Elections

Slate of Officers will be:

- i. Chair - Mike Laven
- ii. Vice Chair - Andrea Boettger
- iii. Treasurer - Marie Dranttel
- iv. Secretary - Jim Branstad

3. Commissioner Absence Discussion

A draft letter was presented for review, intended to notify the City of North Mankato that their representative on the Commission has missed three consecutive meetings. Discussion followed regarding representation for cities with populations over 10,000 and the number of seats allocated on the Commission under state statute, bylaws, and other governing documents. It was determined that the draft letter will need to be revised and brought back to the Board after additional research is completed.

4. Commissioner Absence Discussion

Loveall moved to rescind the December 4, 2024, decision removing Faribault County's representative (himself) and to retract the October 16, 2024, Removal Letter. Lilienthal seconded the motion. Motion carried.

b. Executive Director's Report – Jessica Beyer

Jessica reported that the staff report has been updated to a new project-based layout and that work is underway to incorporate a Gantt chart to better track project progress. She noted the addition of two new commissioners representing the Youth High School Age Commissioner seat and Blue Earth County's small cities. Open seats remain for representatives from Faribault County Townships and Special Interest Groups-Minority Populations. Jessica also shared that RNDC is partnering with Greater Mankato Growth and Minnesota State University, Mankato, to host a Workforce Summit on May 20. She reminded board members to sign up for the upcoming Bus Tour scheduled for June 18. Additionally, she noted that Nicole returned this week from medical leave, and a video message Nicole prepared while attending the SelectUSA Summit was shared with the board.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioners shared updates from their communities.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Wilkening moved to adjourn. Loveall seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:04 p.m.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

To: RNDC Board of Directors
From: Stephanie Hipipre, Finance Director
Date: July 31, 2025
Re: Financial Statement – Board of Directors Meeting, August 13, 2025

At this time, I am unable to certify a complete balance sheet or full statement of accounts for presentation at the Board of Directors meeting on August 13, 2025. I am currently in the process of verifying and reconciling every line item on the Balance Sheet generated by our accounting system (GMS) to ensure accuracy. During this review, I have identified some issues that require resolution. These matters are detailed in the memos included with my Finance Director's report.

While a full financial statement is pending, I am providing below a disclosure of cash balances held in RNDC's bank accounts as of July 31, 2025, to offer visibility into our current liquidity position.

Region Nine Development Commission

MAGIC Account: \$804,488.90
Wells Fargo Payroll: \$279,986.81
Total Cash: \$1,084,475.71

Legacy Revolving Loan Fund

MAGIC Account: \$1,703,539.18

CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund

MAGIC Account: \$60,442.93

Region Nine Area Inc.

Wells Fargo: \$44,625.40
Wells Fargo: \$3,118.64

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

Name: Nicole Griensewic
Event: NADO Fly In
Travel Destination: Washington, DC
Date of Departure: Monday, September 8, 2025
Date of Return: Thursday, September 11, 2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	DCA	\$ 762.98	General Fund
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration	N/A				
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Estimate	Funding Source
Lodging	3	x	\$ 275.00	\$ 825.00	General Fund
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	4	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 300.00	General Fund
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	156	x	\$ 0.70	\$ 109.20	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
\$ 2,047.18

Employee Signature: _____

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes:

*The request was approved in February, with the original intention of coordinating it with the SelectUSA Summit and sharing a flight.

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

Name:	Nicole Griensewic
Event:	NADO Annual Training Conference
Travel Destination	Salt Lake City, UT
Date of Departure:	Monday, October 13, 2025
Date of Return:	Friday, October 17, 2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	SLC	676.98	General Fund
	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Registration	Early Bird Conference Rate			\$ 700.00	General Fund
	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
Lodging	4	x	\$ 249.00	\$ 996.00	General Fund
	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
Meals	5	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 375.00	General Fund
	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
Mileage	156	x	\$ 0.70	\$ 109.20	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	\$ 2,907.18
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Employee Signature: _____

Authorization Signature: _____

Notes:

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

Name: Tom Polich
Event: NADO Annual Training Conference
Travel Destination: Salt Lake City, UT
Date of Departure: Tuesday, October 14, 2025
Date of Return: Friday, October 17, 2025

Anticipated Costs:

	Departure Airport		Arrival Airport	Cost	Funding Source
Airfare (Roundtrip)	MSP	to	SLC	\$ 633.00	Food Rescue
Registration	Description			Cost	Funding Source
	Early Bird Registration			\$ -	N/A
Lodging	Total Nights		\$ Per Night	Cost	Funding Source
	3	x	\$ 275.00	\$ 825.00	Food Rescue
Meals	Total Days		\$ Per Diem	Cost	Funding Source
	4	x	\$ 75.00	\$ 300.00	Food Rescue
Mileage	Total Miles		\$ Per Mile	Cost	Funding Source
	162	x	\$ 0.70	\$ 113.40	Food Rescue
Other	Description			Cost	Funding Source
	Parking			\$ 131.00	Food Rescue
Other	Description			Cost	Funding Source
Total Anticipated Cost of Out-of-State Travel Request				\$ 2,002.40	

Executive Director Signature: _____

Notes: NADO will cover the cost of Tom's Conference Registration since he will be presenting.



Federal EDA Disaster Assistance Region Nine Projects in Development

(Additional Projects Anticipated)

Canon River Watershed Flood Mitigation Project with Le Sueur, Rice, and Waseca Counties

Region Nine asked to lead with Grant Administration

Martin County Economic Recovery & Resilience Project

Region Nine asked to lead with Grant Administration

Springfield Infrastructure Resiliency Project

Region Nine asked to lead with Grant Administration

Region Nine Rural Workforce and Economic Resilience Initiative

Region Nine would be the Applicant

City of North Mankato Infrastructure Project

Technical Assistance provided by Region Nine

New Richland Flood Project (Waseca County)

Technical Assistance provided by Region Nine

Finance Director's Report

August 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

Submitted by Stephanie Hilpipre

Finance

- Please review the three memos attached to this report that need to be addressed.
 - State Competitiveness Fund - \$46,333.10 Overstatement of Accounts
 - Discovery of Previously Unrecorded Asset – Principal Finance Group Shares
 - Unlocked Offsite Storage Unit
- I have a meeting on Thursday, August 7th with Abdo regarding preparations for our Fiscal Year 2025 audit. I will report on the outcome of that meeting during the Board meeting
- As noted in my financial statement, I am currently reviewing our Balance Sheet line by line to verify the accuracy of our reported assets and liabilities. This is a significant and time-intensive process, but necessary to ensure our financial records are accurate ahead of audit season.
- During the five-month vacancy in the Finance Director position, many Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable entries in GMS were not properly coded to the correct projects. Since those months have been closed out, these entries cannot be corrected directly. Each disbursement and deposit must be individually reviewed, and corrections will need to be made through General Journal Adjustments prior to the FY2025 audit. I have not yet started this process, and anticipate it will be highly time-consuming.
- I have not had time to process Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable during my time as Finance Director. Jazmine has taken on a significant additional workload to assist in these areas while also maintaining her Revolving Loan Fund responsibilities. She also temporarily handled payroll during the beginning of my tenure, though I have since resumed full oversight of payroll operations.
- I am working with MSU to create a Finance Intern position, partially cost-offset by the Federal Work Study program. The intern will focus primarily on organizing and digitizing our paper-based financial filing system, with the long-term goal of transitioning RNDC to digital recordkeeping.

Revolving Loan Fund

- CARES Act RLF Plan
 - Current Principal Outstanding: \$787,762.11
 - Current MAGIC Account Balance: \$1,703,539.18
- Legacy RLF Plan
 - Current Principal Outstanding: \$1,316,235.36
 - Current MAGIC Account Balance: \$60,442.93
 - Past Due Accounts: 2 – One is in the process of being completely paid off, the other is responsive and working with Jazmine regarding cash flow issues.
- Financial forecasters are anticipating that the Fed will decrease interest rates later this year. I had a meeting with PFM, the financial institution overseeing our MAGIC accounts, to discuss moving some of the RLF funds to term accounts to secure better interest rates in anticipation of this rate

cut. The minimum investment for their TERM account is \$1 million, so the RLF account is our only account that qualifies for this investment.

- We received notice from the EDA that the restatement of the CARES Act RLF Lending Plan is due in October 2025. Currently working with Jazmine and Mark on the restatement to be presented for approval at the October Full Commission Meeting.
- The Legacy RLF account has been deregulated from the EDA. As such, Jazmine, Mark and myself are discussing changing the investment format of those funds. We will be unable to commit time to this until after completing our work with the CARES Act RLF restatement.

Region Nine Area, Inc.

- Working with Burkhardt and Burkhardt to file past due Form 990s

Human Resources

- We have an employee that reported missing deposits from their ICMA 457(b) deferred compensation plan. Funds were withheld from their paycheck in 2024 but never deposited into their retirement account.
- We have an employee who reported missing deposits from their HSA account. Funds were withheld from their wages in 2025 but never deposited into their HSA account. A similar issue occurred in 2024 for all employees, but I think fixes were already implemented.
- I'm working on reconciling HSA and Retirement accounts for all employees.
- Our Workers Comp Insurance has been temporarily cancelled due to the Workers Comp Audit only being half completed by former Finance Director, Melissa Reintjes. Jessica and myself are currently coordinating to resolve the issue.
- All employees who were hired during 2025 were never enrolled in our company's Life Insurance Policy. I worked to complete enrollment for all employees.
- At the next staff meeting, I will be working to ensure beneficiary forms are on file for Life Insurance Policies and Retirement Plans for all employees
- Paid Family Leave goes into effect on January 1, 2026. Decisions regarding employer vs. employee payment of the premium will be discussed at the September Budget & Personnel Meeting. I have an upcoming seminar in August to attend regarding implementation and management of this new program. I'm also coordinating with our lawyers and the B&P committee to update our Family Leave Policy in our Employee Handbook.
- In August I also have an Insurance Pool Membership Meeting to attend for our health insurance with South Central Services Cooperative regarding renewal and administration of our health insurance plan.

MEMORANDUM

To: RNDC Board of Directors
From: Stephanie Hipipre, Finance Director
Date: July 30, 2025
Re: State Competitiveness Fund – \$46,333.10 Overstatement of Accounts

Dear Board Members,

This memo provides a summary of the current status of RNDC's State Competitiveness Fund (SCF) grant and outlines an issue concerning the fiscal year 2024 portion of the award and a resulting overstatement of our accounts.

Background

On June 5, 2025, I spoke with Denise Lindom from the Minnesota Department of Commerce regarding RNDC's SCF grant. This is a three-year award totaling **\$290,000**, allocated as follows:

- **FY2024:** \$42,934
- **FY2025:** \$121,116
- **FY2026:** \$125,950

The purpose of the call was to understand why RNDC had not received any SCF funds during FY2025. During the conversation, Denise confirmed that no payment requests have ever been submitted to the Department of Commerce under this grant.

Issue Identified – Missed FY2024 Reimbursement

The SCF grant was awarded on February 16, 2024, with a submission deadline of **July 15, 2024** for reimbursement of expenses incurred between 2/16/24 and 6/30/24. Unfortunately, the prior Finance Director did not submit any invoices before the deadline. As a result, RNDC forfeited the opportunity to

claim **\$46,333.10** in FY2024 expenses. These incurred expenses were primarily for labor, fringe, and indirect costs that were paid based on hours worked in support of this grant.

Despite no funds being requested or received, this amount was recorded in our accounting system as an invoice to be paid, so the FY2024 SCF budget would balance to zero. It appeared on both our balance sheet and the FY2024 audit as Accounts Receivable. However, the reimbursement deadline passed before the audit was completed, and this misstatement resulted in an inaccurate representation of our financial position.

In short, **our accounts are currently overstated by \$46,333.10 due to this uncollectible receivable.**

Additional Findings of Fact

Further review of former Finance Director Ky Battern's emails revealed the following:

1. On **December 19, 2024**, Ky emailed Denise Lindom requesting guidance on how to submit a payment request for expenses incurred in fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.
2. On **December 23, 2024**, a meeting titled "SCF Invoicing Overview" was held between Ky and Denise. During that meeting, it is likely Ky was informed that the FY2024 reimbursement deadline had passed and that the corresponding Accounts Receivable entry was invalid.
3. On **December 26, 2024**, there was an email exchange between Deputy Director Jessica Beyer and Ky requesting a Finance Director report and financials for the January Full Commission Packet. Ky declined to produce the requested reports.
4. This accounting error was never disclosed to staff prior to Ky's departure on **December 28, 2024**.

Current Status and Next Steps

The good news is that unused funds roll over to subsequent fiscal years until the grant expires on June 30, 2026. We can still draw down the full \$290,000, but only for new, eligible expenses moving forward. I submitted an invoice before the July 15, 2025 deadline for reimbursement of FY2025 expenses, ensuring RNDC remains in good standing with the grant's terms.

We have contacted our insurance provider to determine whether this situation qualifies for coverage under our policy, which includes Accounts Receivable Loss protection up to \$500,000.

Summary

- RNDC missed the opportunity to claim FY2024 SCF grant funds due to an unsubmitted invoice.
- \$46,333.10 was improperly recorded as Accounts Receivable and recognized revenue in both GMS and our FY2024 audit.
- This error was known by the prior Finance Director but was not communicated before his departure.
- RNDC's accounts are currently **overstated by \$46,333.10** as a result.

MEMORANDUM

To: RNDC Board of Directors
From: Stephanie Hipipre, Finance Director
Date: July 25, 2025
Re: Discovery of Previously Unrecorded Asset – Principal Financial Group Shares

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to inform you of a recent and significant discovery related to RNDC's financial assets.

In July 2025, the finance office received a dividend check from Principal Financial Group in the amount of \$2,742.08. Initially, I believed the check was connected to our employee life insurance policies. However, further investigation confirmed that it was unrelated, prompting a deeper review.

I first contacted our life insurance agent, Casey West, who clarified that the dividend payments are tied to shares of Principal Financial Group that RNDC has held since the company demutualized and went public in 2001.

I then contacted Computershare, the entity that issued the dividend check, and confirmed the following:

- RNDC currently holds **3,608 shares** of Principal Financial Group
- All shares were issued in connection with the company's IPO on **October 26, 2001**
- As of today, the shares are valued at approximately **\$81 each**, totaling an estimated market value of **\$292,248**
- We will gain full online access to the Computershare account once an access code is mailed to us
- The shares **can be liquidated** once full access is obtained

Additionally, I reviewed the dividend history of Principal Financial Group and confirmed through our accounting system (GMS) that my predecessors have cashed dividend checks for each recorded dividend date since payments began in October 2002.

Key Issues and Considerations:

1. This asset does not appear on our current balance sheet, in GMS, or in our most recent audits.
2. RNDC has held this asset for **24 years**, and I have found no evidence that it was ever recorded. The checks are addressed to our current office, suggesting some account maintenance did occur during this time.
3. Minnesota State Statute most likely prohibits us from holding publicly traded stocks. We will need to proceed with liquidation once I gain full account access with Computershare.
4. One reason holding stocks is likely prohibited is because of capital gains. I have yet to fully investigate the consequences or penalties of liquidating this asset.

At this point, all evidence points to this being a previously unrecorded asset, currently valued at approximately **\$292,000**, that can be converted to cash. I am continuing to investigate why this asset was never accounted for and will work to ensure it is properly documented moving forward.

MEMORANDUM

To: RNDC Board of Directors
From: Stephanie Hipipre, Finance Director
Date: July 28, 2025
Re: Unlocked Offsite Storage Unit

On Monday, July 28, 2025, I visited RNDC's offsite storage unit for the first time since beginning my employment. The unit is located at Security Storage Systems, 420 Webster Ave, North Mankato. Upon arrival, I observed that while the padlock was secured, the latch had not been slid into place to lock the unit. As a result, I was able to easily lift the roll-top door and access the contents without unlocking and removing the padlock. For reference, I have included a photo of the lock and latch at the end of this memo.

Statement of Facts:

- The storage unit contains past personnel records for terminated employees, Revolving Loan Fund financial documents, and RNDC financial records from prior fiscal years.
- These records include personally identifiable information (PII), financial data for loan recipients, and other sensitive materials.
- The prior Finance Director, Ky Battern, transferred the storage unit keys to Lending Specialist Jazmine Flores during his final week of employment in December 2024.
- Jazmine did not visit the unit or pass the key to another RNDC employee while the key was in her possession.

- I received the keys from Jazmine during my first week of employment. They have remained in my possession since.
- The last known RNDC employee to access the unit was Ky Battern.
- It is unknown when the unit was last accessed and therefore left unsecured.
- The storage unit is located outdoors, adjacent to a public road, and lacks a gate, keypad, or other physical security measures aside from surveillance cameras.
- We cannot rule out the possibility that a member of the general public may have accessed the unit.
- There are no visible signs of tampering or disruption within the unit.
- There is no inventory or log of the contents stored at the facility, so we are unable to verify whether any documents are missing.
- Nicole notified our insurance provider about the unsecured condition of the files and the potential security breach. Our insurance agent, Jay Weir, indicated that, based on the lack of visible tampering or disturbance, he does not view the situation as a significant concern.
- The Finance office is coordinating a move to a more secure indoor facility.





Outreach and Funding Opportunities

Agenda

- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant
- Solar on Public Buildings
- CERTs Seed Grant
- Upcoming Opportunities

EECBG – Eligible Funding Uses

- **Funded through MN Dept of Commerce**
 - Capacity to support *8 communities*; **\$12,250-20,000** per community (dependent on services)
 - Communities (or counties) must be under 15,000 in population
- **Planning Efforts** – Anything related to resilience, energy savings/efficiency, extreme weather preparedness
- **Energy Audits** – Publicly owned buildings
 - Funding would pass through RNDC to the entity performing the audit(s) at no cost to the community
- **Specific Resilience Projects** – Similar criteria for planning, must be related to resilience, energy savings, efficiency, etc
 - Funding would pass through RNDC in this case as well

Ongoing Projects

Fairmont Energy and Environmental Resilience Plan:

- Community resilience committee
- Interviews with city staff; Public Works, EDA, EMS, Electric Superintendent, Finance
- Community-wide survey shaped by committee feedback
- Presenters - Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs), Minnesota Climate Action Partnership (MCAP)
- Public engagement – Thresher Day, LakeFest

Saint James Energy Audits for Public Buildings:

- 5 Public buildings received audits; gas and electric
- Contracted with Frontier Energy
- Identified energy efficient upgrade opportunities
- Well-positioned for future implementation funding

Ongoing Outreach

Welcome:

- Investigating partners to perform Reverse Osmosis study; state mandated installation by 2028

Mapleton:

- Moving forward with energy audits for public buildings; in process of signing MOU and developing RFP

St. Peter:

- Resilience Plan; eventually to be integrated into larger Comprehensive Plan; interested in best practices and identifying project opportunities

Le Sueur:

- Potential interest in conducting Energy Resilience Plan

Blue Earth:

- Preliminary engagement; potential interest in community resilience plan

- Submit Application
 - Brief intake form to define the project
- Council/Community Approval
- Sign MOU with RNDC and/or entity performing the work



Your regional partner for progress.
3 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 310, Mankato, MN 56001
507.387.5643

Region Nine Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategies Grant Application

"The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program is designed to assist states, local governments, and Tribes in implementing strategies to reduce energy use, to reduce fossil fuel emissions, and to improve energy efficiency." (energy.gov)

Project Goal: Under this award, the Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC) will administer sub-grants to local governments in small cities or towns (population under 15,000). Awards to local governments can be between \$2,000 - \$12,250.

Funds from these grants may be used for a variety of energy planning and project development uses, including but not limited to:

1. Climate, energy, and resiliency planning
RNDC staff are experienced in climate resilience and community energy planning, including our most recent plan completed for the City of Comfrey. Our planning services would result in a planning document informed by relevant data and guided by the specific goals and interests of each community served. The process would also include education and engagement with city staff, community stakeholders, and residents to prepare the community for implementation funds. Other consultants could also conduct these plans.
2. Energy audits on government facilities
A comprehensive assessment of the energy use and efficiency of lights, insulation, HVAC systems, and other equipment that may be at a city-owned facility. It should be completed by a certified energy professional.
3. Engineering and technical assistance services for government facilities
The initial planning or engineering work required for the successful implementation of a project in the community (upgrading furnaces, lighting study, substation upgrade, etc.) Should be completed by a qualified energy professional or engineer
4. Other energy-related studies for public buildings and community plans

**Funds cannot be used for implementation projects*

Applicant Information

Name of City: _____

Contact Name and Title: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Address: _____



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3 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 310, Mankato, MN 56001
507.387.5643

Project Type (choose all that apply)

☐ Energy and Environment Planning

☐ Energy Audit of City Buildings/Facilities

☐ Climate and/or Energy-Focused Preliminary Work (e.g., Engineering)

☐ Other Energy Related Studies

Brief Project Description of Your Project Ideas (500 Character Limit)

Write your project ideas here

Intended Service Providers (Select All That Apply)

☐ Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC)

☐ Other Firm(s); if known

Firm Name(s):

• _____

• _____

• _____

If fund distribution via reimbursement poses a significant difficulty to your city*, please explain here for additional consideration (300 Character Limit)

9 Counties

33 School Districts

72 Cities

147 Townships

www.rndc.org


9 Counties

33 School Districts

72 Cities

147 Townships

www.rndc.org


Process to Apply



Solar on Public Buildings

Funded by Minnesota Department of
Commerce

SOPB – General RFP Breakdown

- Max Amount – 70% of system cost, not to exceed \$112K
 - 48E ITC would cover the remaining 30%
- Construction must begin by the end of this year (12/31/25)
 - Recipients must apply for the 48E clean energy ITC
 - Resources available to help navigate this process
- Buildings must be publicly owned and operated
 - “Operated” defined as the city must pay the building’s electric utility bill and have some oversight over the management of the facility
- System is not to exceed the lesser of 40kwh or 120% of the building’s annual electricity consumption

Additional Thoughts

Competitive Application; first come, first serve basis

- Time is of the essence

Application is expanded beyond Xcel Territory

- Accessible across the state, unlike previous rounds

Majority of solar and wind tax credits are going away

- Major cost incentives will no longer be available, making these projects much more costly and difficult to complete

This is energy resilience

- Offset utility costs and less vulnerable to grid instability

- Eligible Building Examples:

- City Hall
- Fire Department
- Municipal Liquor Store
- Library
- Police Department

Seed Grants

————— \$5,000-10,000 Awards

Seeking proposals related to energy efficiency, renewable energy, electric vehicles, and energy storage projects.

Accepting applications for projects that:

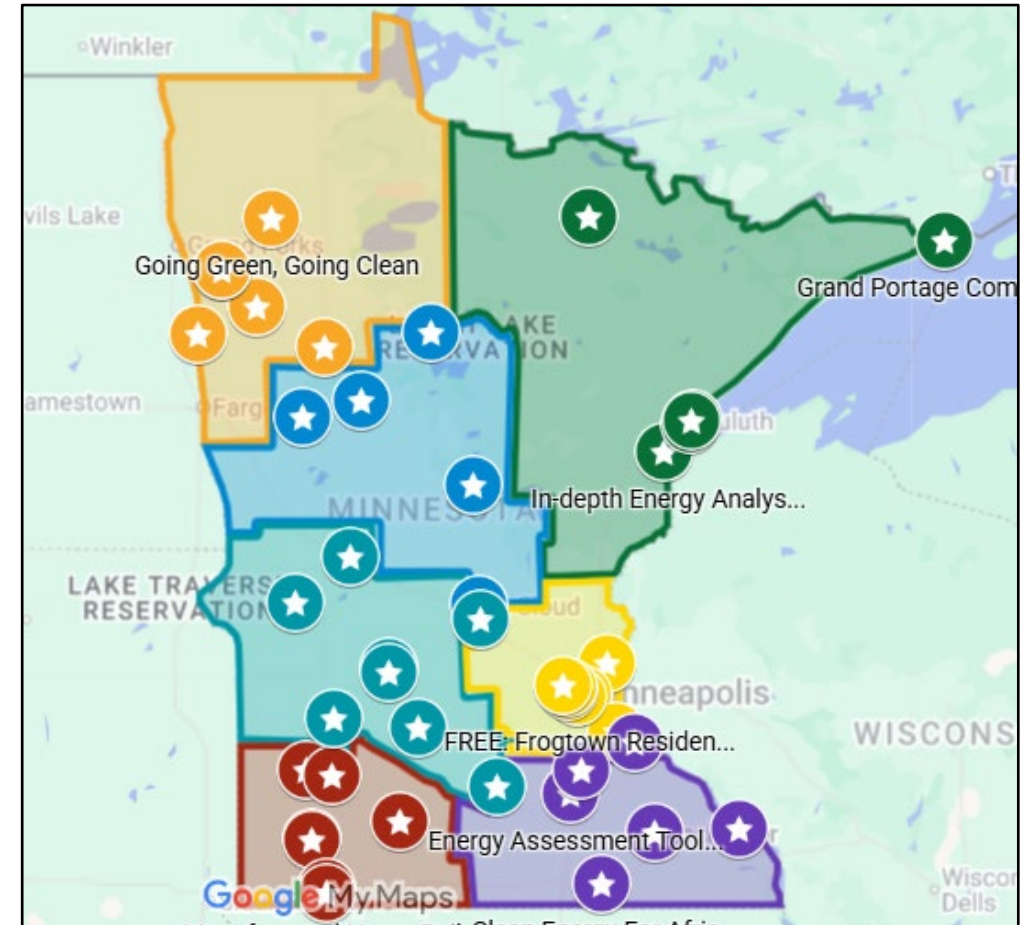
- Help educate people on clean energy
- Build community and engage a variety of partnerships
- Highly visible and replicable for other communities



Application Deadline
10/1/2025

CERTs – Project Examples

- Energy Assessment Tool Library
- Community Center Energy Efficient Upgrades
- Lighting Upgrades for County Buildings
- Home Education and Energy Saving Program
- Energy Assessments and Studies
- Community Outreach for Energy Efficiency



2024 Award Winners

End

Secretary Rollins Terminates COVID-era Program

(Washington, D.C., July 15, 2025) – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins today announced the termination of the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC) program. This pandemic-era, Biden program was created using one-time, temporary funding from Congress. The Department is terminating this program that should not have been established in this manner in the first place, but are doing so in a way to honor commitments made to farmers.

“The Biden Administration created multiple, massive programs without any long-term way to finance them. This is not sustainable for farmers who rely on these programs, and it flies in the face of Congressional intent,” said Secretary Rollins. “USDA will honor existing commitments for over 450 grants to farmers and food businesses to ensure planning decisions on the farm can continue as normal, however stakeholders should not plan on this program continuing. Any remaining funds will be repurposed to better support American agriculture.”

Out of the 12 RFBC’s, only 8 have selected or issued Business Builder grants. USDA will honor current and pending commitments to producers and food businesses through the Business Builder subaward program. Due to the broad scope of the program, and a long process of setting up partnerships and conducting work planning, a relatively small number of those Business Builder grants have been awarded to date. RFBC’s that have executed or announced Business Builder subawards will have the option to continue managing those existing commitments through May 2026. Centers that have not yet made Business Builder commitments will be terminated; these include the Great Lakes Midwest RFBC, Southeast RFBC, Delta RFBC, and Islands and Remote Areas RFBC.

The process to terminate the NC-RFBC executed cooperative grant agreement with USDA AMS as of TODAY is –

- The current approved reimbursement requests we have submitted to USDA AMS will be processed this week and payment for your reimbursement invoices through February 26, 2025 will be sent to your organizations asap.
- The Business Builder recipients will also be able to submit invoices and proof of spending for their projects. We are hoping to get payments to all of the North Central RFBC – Business Builder recipients AS SOON AS possible. The R5DC team will be in communication with all BB recipients.
- R5DC will do keep the stories from this program on our website, as I’m sure USDA AMS will shut down the NC-RFBC site very soon.
- R5DC will keep the SharePoint site open until March 1, 2026, so please get copies of anything you’d like to keep from sharepoint before then.
- R5DC has 60 days to complete a mandatory amendment request with new budget and timelines. Given that all of your contracts are cancelled and we are hopeful we’d be able to get the BB recipients their funds in a timely manner.... I estimate that the full program will be closed before January 2026.

Nate George
Communications Manager
507.389.8873 | nate@rndc.org

For Immediate Release
July 23, 2025

Region Nine Development Commission Honored with 2025 Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations

MANKATO, Minn. —

Mankato – Region Nine Development Commission based in Mankato has recently been recognized with a 2025 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for the *Building a More Sustainable Model for Rural EMS in Region Nine* project.

This project was a partnership between the University of Minnesota Extension - Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Region Nine Development Commission, and South Central EMS. The goal of the project was to find and develop strategies to address the root causes of poor recruitment and retention in the rural EMS profession. This included an environmental scan of recruitment and retention practices and conditions in rural EMS nationwide, a review of relevant literature, interviews with stakeholders and key informants, and both in-person and online listening sessions with EMS professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

“Access to reliable EMS services is vital to the health and resilience of rural communities in south central Minnesota. RNDC is honored to receive this national recognition and proud to have partnered with local and statewide leaders to help look for solutions for our EMS professionals. This award affirms the critical need to invest in the people and systems that keep our communities safe,” said RNDC Executive Director Nicole Griensewic.

Presented annually, the NADO Impact Awards honor regional development organizations and their partners for strengthening communities, building regional resilience, and enhancing local economies through innovative approaches to economic and community development. NADO is a Washington, DC-based membership association of regional development organizations that promotes programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies.

These award-winning efforts will be recognized during NADO’s 2025 Annual Training Conference, held this coming October in Salt Lake City, Utah. All selected projects are featured in an interactive StoryMap that showcases summaries, images, and key partners. The map is available at www.nado.org/2025impactawards/.

“The Impact Awards are an annual reminder of the creativity and commitment that regional development organizations bring to their communities,” said 2024-2025 NADO President Rick Hunsaker, Executive Director of the Region XII Council of Governments in Iowa. “This year’s awardees show how local and regional partnerships, driven by vision and collaboration, can lead to lasting positive change across our country.”

The Impact Awards are presented in memory of Duluth native, Aliceann Wohlbruck, NADO's first executive director, who was a lifelong advocate for regional solutions and rural economic development.

For more information, contact Communications Manager Nate George at nate@rndc.org.

###

Region Nine Development Commission takes great pride in working with and on behalf of counties, cities, townships, and schools throughout South Central Minnesota. Since 1972, being a partner for progress has led to the development of programs and identification of solutions in the areas of community development, economic development, transportation, healthy communities, business development, and leveraging regional resources.

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) promotes public policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through the regional strategies, coordination efforts, and program expertise of the nation's regional development organizations. Learn more about NADO at www.nado.org.



"Access to reliable EMS services is vital to the health and resilience of rural communities in south central Minnesota. RNDC is honored to receive this national recognition and proud to have partnered with local and statewide leaders to help look for solutions for our EMS professionals. This award affirms the critical need to invest in the people and systems that keep our communities safe."

STAFF UPDATES | August 2025

PROGRAM UPDATES:

Springfield CARES Childcare Project– Alejandra, Nate

Alejandra is working with the City of Springfield CARES Group to conduct stakeholder outreach and engagement with childcare providers and parents in the city. The recently formed non-profit organization is providing childcare support to providers in the city. Alejandra presented at a provider appreciation event, and distributed surveys for the providers. Alejandra also worked on analyzing and sharing the findings from the survey with the CARES group.

Annual Performance Progress Report – Alejandra

Alejandra has kicked off the reporting process for the Annual Performance Progress Report, which is done annually as part of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and the Partnership Planning Grant through the EDA. As part of this work, Alejandra will collaborate with the CED committee and conduct a statewide regional survey to gather input on strategies, priorities, and the challenges facing the region.

Rural Child Care Innovation Program in Eagle Lake – Alejandra

There are no new updates at this time.

Childcare Steering Committee – Alejandra

There are no new updates at this time.

Community and Economic Development Committee – Alejandra

Alejandra leads the Community and Economic Development (CED) Committee and is currently organizing the August meeting, which will focus on regional trends and priorities. The data and insights obtained during August's meeting will be included in the Annual Performance Progress Report. During the June meeting, committee members heard from John Pournoor, who presented regional and state economic trends as well as upcoming changes to funding opportunities at both the state and federal levels. Della Schmidt from Greater Mankato Growth also presented on *Transforming Tomorrow Together* and encouraged committee members to get involved and participate.

Transforming Tomorrow Together Talent Hub – Alejandra

There are no new updates at this time.

Regional Food System Supply Chains and Transportation Implications – Kristian, Aaron

On July 1, RNDC and the U of M, Redlands University, Georgetown, and ESRI research team began the second phase of the agriculture and food industry study on behalf of the Transportation Policy and Economic Competitiveness (TPEC) program. RNDC co-directs this work and has provided a cluster study of agriculture and food value creation in the context of transportation needs in the larger Upper Midwest region (MN, Ill., IA, and WI). Senator John Jasinski represents southcentral Minnesota on TPEC's advisory board, along with other state senators, MN House Representatives, representatives from statewide industries, MnDOT, DEED, Met Council, Greater MSP, and elected officials from across the state. The work will conclude by June 2026.

Regional Food Rescue – Tom/Sabri

The running total for rescued food that RNDC has assisted or organized for the year is 41,796 lbs. of food, worth approximately \$62,665. This food has been disbursed into the community through area partners, some of the largest recipients of the food are ECHO, SCMNR, St. Peter Food Shelf, Waseca Area Food Shelf, and Watonwan Co. Food Shelf. Some of the most common types of food rescued have included potatoes, biscuits, squash, zucchini, peppers, and cucumbers. July has been the busiest month so far with 14 rescues and just shy of 20,000 lbs. of food rescued.

Tom continues to search for ways to solve the logistical hurdles with regional food rescue. The next step will be to procure funding for a regional solution such as a small, refrigerated truck or large van. The team submitted their transportation funding request for \$5,000 to the Mankato Area Foundation Giving Catalog. If funded, this will help offset some of the cost of transport until a permanent solution is found.

Additional food access partners across the region have been contacted. Most recently Tom met with Jesse at the SCC College Pantry to start food rescue efforts with them.

Food Access Partnership Building – Tom

Tom has been building relationships with area food access partners to help guarantee the strength of their operations in the community. He has been assisting FOCP in volunteering for the STOMP program over the summer and with the creation of their Community Cupboard.

The Mayo Clinic Refrigerator Program, previously managed by Rachel Jones of the University of Minnesota Extension and SNAP-Ed, has undergone changes due to national budget cuts that led to the elimination of her position. Currently, Tom is overseeing the two refrigerator locations, ensuring they are well-stocked and clean.

Research has been conducted on alternative and ethnically relevant food sources for Crossroads Campus Cupboard and Watonwan County Food Shelf. A great example of this was the rescue of 225 lbs. of pork ears. This was greatly appreciated in the Watonwan Co. Food Shelf where they have a higher percentage of Latino clients that use them in culturally relevant dishes within their community and rarely get the chance to get items like this through their food bank.

Make Hunger History Initiative in St. James – Tom

The MHH plan has identified solutions phase and is currently in the implementation phase. Moving forward, they will not have any new meetings but each area or “sub-committee” will meet as possible to work on their assigned task and fully implement the solutions within each area of improvement (transportation, food rescue, cultural inclusion initiatives, and funding).

Local Foods Month – Sabri, Nate

For the event this summer there are eight farms and 11 restaurants that will be participating. Sabri has developed and distributed the social media kits to all partners who have been posting them to build support for the event. Sabri has arranged a segment on Kato Living and helped get an article in the Fairmont Sentinel about the event as well.

Nate created social media images and print flyers to promote each LFM partnership. He also attended GreenSeam’s Celebration of Ag event with Sabri to promote the event and has been reaching out to the media to gain more exposure. Sabri and Nicole will be on KTOE’s *Talk of the Town* program on Friday August 8th at 10 am to promote Local Foods Month.

Mankato Permanent Farmer’s Market Pavilion – Sabri

There are no new updates at this time.

Revolving Loan Fund – Jazmine

Jazmine recently closed two new Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) loans. The first supported the development of Crystal Clean Car Wash in St. James, a new facility that will include a pet wash, car wash, and laundromat. The second loan was awarded to The Coffee Keller, an existing coffee shop in New Ulm, which is now expanding into a new location with twice the current square footage.

Initial conversations are also underway with two boutique hotels in the region that are exploring opportunities to expand and potentially partner with a nationally recognized brand such as Marriott.

Jazmine continues to work closely with the team behind a new indoor park coming to Mankato, collaborating with partners to determine a strategic and sustainable loan structure. In addition, early discussions have begun with a client interested in developing a trampoline park in the Mankato area. An application and documentation checklist has been provided as the project enters the initial phase of evaluation.

Jazmine is also progressing through the application process with *3 Brothers Meat Market*; a new business planned for Mapleton. Region Nine is nearing the final stages and anticipates presenting this project to the Loan Committee soon for approval.

Lastly, Jazmine was recently appointed to the St. Peter Economic Development Authority (EDA) Board. She plans to leverage this role to expand Region Nine's network, supporting the RLF program by connecting with new entrepreneurs and promoting business development in St. Peter.

St. James Energy Navigators – Sabri

The first community education event was a success and had 28 households in attendance. At the event seven households were selected for upgrades which are now underway including new air source heat pumps, adding insulation, and installing new air source heat pump water heaters.

Transportation/MnDOT Regional Planning Grant – Joel, Mark

Mark and Joel participated in the kick-off meetings and walk/bike audits for the St. James and North Mankato Active Transportation Plans which will be developed 2025-2026. It is expected that Mark and Joel will be involved with the demonstration project which will be part of each city's plan.

Mark and Joel attended the ATP-7 meeting on June 20. There, Erik Rudeen with MnDOT Central Office gave a legislative session recap. Joe Roby with the City of Le Sueur presented the city's proposal for Corridors of Commerce. MnDOT staff also presented modifications and amendments to the STIP, changes to the ATIP since March, and an overview of CHIP projects.

For 2025-2026, MnDOT District 6 will be updating their Corridor Management Plans for two of their three Scenic Byways. Joel and Mark are looking forward to the project as Scenic Byways meld tourism, history, economic development, placemaking, and transportation.

Mark continued his transportation safety planning work in the nine-county region by periodically reviewing crash data and working with the local road authority to identify crash clusters and the appropriate countermeasures.

Mark and Joel worked with FHWA's Minnesota office to finalize the cooperative agreement language for Region Nine's Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant. While the document awaits FHWA's signature, FHWA kicked off a new call for SS4A proposals. Region Nine provided letters of support for Green Isle and the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies.

The City of Le Sueur requested a letter of support for its application to MnDOT's Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement program. Mark provided the letter, noting the alignment of Le Sueur's safety and multimodal goals with Region Nine's upcoming Comprehensive Road Safety Action Plan for Le Sueur County (~2027).

Joel has planned the quarterly Region Nine TAC meeting. It will be held at the RNDC office and virtually on August 15. Our guest speaker is Chris Webb with Southwest Regional Development Commission presenting on SRDC's regional trails plan. Mark will also give an update on regional road safety at this meeting, and TAC members will have a roundtable where they discuss transportation-related issues in their communities/counties.

Joel and Mark attended the RDO Transportation Planners quarterly meeting in Marshall on August 12 and 13. There, they heard presentations and had discussions on corridor planning, state trails, pedestrian counting, EV infrastructure needs, transportation advisory committees, and several other state-level transportation planning efforts.

Joel and Mark are working with the MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation to potentially hold a Walk! Bike! Fun! training in the region. This would be a training for educators in the region who would incorporate the curriculum during the school day as well as educators who would use the skills acquired during out-of-school time.

MADO - Nicole

Nicole will be meeting with her Executive Director colleagues for their quarterly meeting in Crookston on Aug. 17-19th. The group will continue to discuss strategic planning for the group. McKnight Foundation set aside funds for MADO to use for purposes such as this to help advance the collective efforts on resiliency work around the state. RNDC holds the grant for MADO, as McKnight Foundation has seen our RDO as a leader in this space and is a trusted partner.

NADO - Nicole

Serving on the Executive Committee and representing the Midwest on the national board, Nicole will be participating in the annual “Fly In” to D.C. on Sept. 8-11th. NADO works to organize meetings with all the heads/#2s of the federal government – such as EDA, DOT, SBA, HUD, Dept of Ag, Dept of Commerce and others. It will certainly be an interesting year, trying to determine which programs and projects the new administration is supportive of.

Nicole had initially hoped to have this trip combined with the May *SelectUSA* conference. However, NADO determined it was best to push the Fly In back as there were too many uncertainties in May. The visits will be imperative, as NADO helps explain which programs are utilized by their membership.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:**Fairmont Energy and Environmental Resilience Plan – Sabri, Sam, Lisa, Nate**

Sabri has distributed the community survey to the committee and community partners. Sabri also organized utility bill inserts with links to the online surveys that will reach 5,000 locations in Fairmont Public Utilities territory. Nate assisted with creating the print version of the surveys.

Strategic Economic Development Plan for the City of Springfield – Alejandra, Nate

Alejandra has completed the Strategic Economic Development Plan for the City of Springfield, and Nate edited and designed the final plan. Alejandra will present the final plan to the Springfield’s EDA and City Council in August.

Faribault/Martin County – Economic Adjustment Assistance – Jessica, Kristian

Ongoing discussions with the federal EDA are in progress. Jessica participated in a presentation to the Martin County EDA on August 4.

Le Sueur County/Waterville Flood Project Coordination – Jessica, Kristian, Alejandra

Ongoing coordination by RNDC is continuing to support Le Sueur County, Waterville, and neighboring counties/communities impacted by the June 2024 flooding. Jessica and Kristian have been facilitating and supporting efforts to help Le Sueur County, along with Waseca and Rice counties as part of a joint application for EDA funds related to the Canon River Watershed through the special disaster funds. Alejandra presented to the Waterville EDA on grant writing and planning services that Region Nine can offer the city and its Economic Development Authority. Ongoing planning work with the counties and the Federal EDA have been taking place related to Region Nine coordinating application materials.

Federal EDA Disaster Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – Jessica, Kristian

RNDC has continued to work to engage with counties and communities to discuss and explore potential projects/needs related to the June 2024 flooding. On June 4, the official Federal EDA Disaster Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) was released. Jessica and Kristian held a Virtual Discussion Session with our Federal Economic Development Representative, Darrin Fleener, to allow county representatives to clarify eligibility requirements, ask questions about the application process, understand how projects should connect to disaster impacts, and share how RNDC can be a resource for assistance. Since that time, outreach has taken place with several jurisdictions and institutions in each of the nine counties by Jessica and Kristian in an effort to get as much Federal EDA investment into our region as possible.

Economic Impact Analysis for the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota – Kristian, Aaron, Nate

RNDC began a feasibility study regarding future programming for the museum on July 1, funded by Compeer Financial to assist the museum with strategic planning. The study will conclude by October 31, 2025.

Eagle Lake Solar on Public Buildings Grant – Sabri

Sabri has continued to work with Eagle Lake on submitting an application for the Solar on Public Buildings Grant. The applications were submitted on May 5th, and they sought funding to install solar at their Public Works building and City Hall and were awarded. However, due to the age of the roof, the city is reassessing whether to move forward.

Waseca Co-op Committee – Sabri

There are no new updates at this time.

Tri-County Solid Waste Plan – Joel, Mark

Joel spoke with Al Christensen, director of Tri-County Solid Waste, on August 1. Al informed Joel that there are some delays in obtaining information needed from other parties and that MPCA is aware of this, and consequently, the planning process is delayed by roughly 6 months. In the meantime, Joel is drafting sections on county backgrounds, demographics, and geology for the plan and will re-convene with Al in September to go over those materials and create a course of action for the remainder of the plan.

Age Friendly Mankato/North Mankato – Jessica, Joel

Joel participated in the final Age Friendly Coalition project team meeting on June 24. There, the team reviewed and made suggestions on the draft action plan before its final iteration is submitted to AARP. The group also discussed potential ways to continue the work since this concluded the first stage of the Age Friendly Communities program. The draft action plan can be viewed here: <https://vinevolunteers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Draft-Action-Plan.pdf>.

Empowering Small Minnesota Communities - Joel

The project report on building a more sustainable model for rural EMS in Region Nine was finalized, and distribution to stakeholders began in May. RNDC received a 2025 NADO Impact Award for the project. Stuart Grande, the lead UofM researcher on the project, applied for a Community Engagement to Advance Research and Community Health (CEARCH) seed grant to further this work and begin to craft actual policy proposals to implement the report's suggestions. Stuart, Joel, and Region Nine Commissioner Dave Borchert plan to present on the project at the October commission meeting.

Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP) – Jessica, Sam, Lisa

There are no new updates at this time.

New Ulm Anaerobic Digestion Initiative – Sam, Lisa

There are no new updates at this time.

Regional Resilience Initiatives – Sam, Lisa

Sam and Lisa have been meeting with regional stakeholders to identify needs and opportunities for long-term solutions regarding extreme weather and climate resilience. These efforts have been supported by completing a preliminary needs assessment, cost comparison models between gray and green infrastructure, and strategic partner engagement. Emerging needs include supporting Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and local governments in project planning and ideation, extending capacity for local partners, and facilitating cross-sector collaboration among local and state entities. Additionally, integrating climate resilient concepts into county-wide hazard mitigation planning presents a valuable opportunity to align environmental stewardship with socioeconomic wellbeing, embedding both into a formal framework for emergency planning and future development.

GRANT COORDINATION AND ADMINISTRATION:**Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) – Sam, Sabri, Lisa**

Mapleton – RNDC held an introductory meeting with the mayor and additional city staff for the city of Mapleton to discuss opportunities to utilize EECBG funding. An opportunity to allocate that funding towards energy audits on public buildings emerged and we are now in the process of coordinating follow-up and next steps to put this in front of council.

Welcome – RNDC held an introductory meeting with the city of Welcome to discuss EECBG opportunities and identified a potential opportunity to fund a preliminary study for the water treatment plant. The city has been mandated by the MPCA to convert the existing system into a reverse osmosis system by 2028, and a preliminary assessment will offer guidance on feasibility and determining a scope of work. RNDC has since inquired with Bolton & Menk to determine if they would be interested and willing to perform the study.

Minneapolis Foundation – Sabri

Nicole signed a DocuSign pass through grant to Region Nine Area Inc. for \$150k from the Minneapolis Foundation to the Southern MN Food Recovery. Sabri assisted Wooden Spoon with the application. Area Inc. is serving as the fiscal sponsor for the grant. RNDC only receives funds for personnel time processing payments and reporting.

Mitigation and Adaptation Project – Sam, Lisa

There are no new updates at this time.

Food Access Grants - Tom

There are no new updates at this time.

COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to the above projects, Nate has assisted in proofing, designing, and typesetting multiple documents and presentation for various projects. He has also been keeping the website updated as many links to funding opportunities have changed or are no longer active. He continues to monitor the changing funding priorities to give website visitors the most accurate information.

ADMINISTRATION**Free Press Advisory Group – Nicole**

Nicole will meet with the advisory group on August 14th. The group provides feedback to the newspaper on their coverage and alerts them of stories and issues that should be covered. Being part of the group has been worthwhile, as numerous stories suggested that involve RNDC's work have been covered, such as local foods and food recovery work.

Center for Rural Affairs Presentation – Nicole

In July, Nicole Griensewic presented to the Center for Rural Affairs (CRA) team, which included staff from MN, SD, IA, and NE working across energy, agriculture, rural development, and health. She shared an overview of Region Nine Development Commission, along with insights on community engagement and local partnerships in climate and energy work. The presentation highlighted Region Nine's role in shaping rural policy through collaborative, on-the-ground efforts. Their team had numerous questions for Nicole regarding how we build partnerships, as well as her career leading an economic development district.

Follow-up from Learning Exchange – Nicole

Nicole has been following up with delegation members, hosts, and other partners who were involved in the learning exchange in June in North Rine West-Westphalia. Nicole has had ongoing conversations with MSU,M, specifically on pursuing aviation-related potential partnerships, as well as other federal grants that could be pursued in partnership with RNDC, as the whole region is eligible for the disaster NOFO. This means it is an ideal time to put in funding requests for the region that would support economic resiliency in the region. There is further discussion on including the College of Engineering with community integrated STEM education pathways. Commissioners Borchert, Boettger, Trapero, Schleuter, and Nowell will present at the October Commission meeting on the learning exchange from their point of view as Commissioners and what it meant to their unit of government.

Rural Energy Academy (REA) – Nicole

Nicole has been invited to be the NADO Board member lead in the launch of the newly formed Rural Energy Academy (REA), a national initiative led by the National Association of Counties (NACo) and funded through the Siting Clean Collaborative (via *Invest in Our Future*). The REA aims to support rural communities in advancing clean energy planning and projects.

ManaGroup Consulting is serving as the technical lead, and NADO has been welcomed as a partner to ensure regional planning voices are at the table. Nicole will be connecting with their team for an upcoming listening session to share insights from Region Nine's work in the energy and climate space, as well as discuss opportunities and challenges relevant to our peers across the country. NADO will contract with RNDC to cover Nicole's staff time as the lead on the new initiative.

Email Security Training - Nicole

Nicole is working with RNDCs IT provider, Thriveon, to set up training for the team on email security due to an increase in phishing emails and other cybersecurity concerns.

State Department J1 VISA Pilot Project/ACE - Nicole

Due to the uncertainties at the federal level, Nicole has stepped back from pursuing a pilot project with the U.S. State Department to expediate J1 VISAs on specialized subject matters.

The State Department was also supportive of funding Nicole's travel for ACE-Belem this month. However, due to funding cuts for their department, Nicole turned down the opportunity. When at ACE, Nicole is asked to represent the U.S. in agriculture, economic development districts, and rural. Nicole has been passionate about ensuring these learning exchanges include representation from rural communities.

Wellness Activity Pickleball – Sarah, all

Each year, RNDC receives Wellness Dollars through our insurance program to support healthy living among staff. Recently, RNDC hosted a Pickleball event at the Pickle Barn (an RLF client), giving staff the chance to learn the game, get active, and enjoy some fun outside the office.

StrengthsFinder Training – Sarah, all

On July 21st, professional coach Diana Gabriel facilitated a half-day StrengthsFinder training for the team. It was a valuable opportunity to come together, gain insight into each other's strengths, and reflect on how those strengths influence our work and collaboration.

GreenCorps- Lisa

Lisa Callahan will have her last day with RNDC on August 12th. Her position was funded by MPCA to assist with community outreach and engagement. She has been an asset to the team and will be missed.

The GreenCorps program and others were not funded going forward. Other grants have been pursued in attempts to retain her talent on the team. However, no grants have been awarded yet.

German Investment & Global Connections in Southern Minnesota

Purpose: This brief highlights the **economic impact of German companies** and **foreign direct investment (FDI)** in Region Nine (R9) and the surrounding region.

1. Why German Investment Matters for Region 9

- Investments provide capital investment, skilled jobs, and global market access.
- They strengthen workforce pipelines, technology transfer, and STEM education.
- These investments position Region 9 as globally connected, competitive in agriculture, industry, and innovation.

Key Impacts:

- **Jobs:** Foreign-owned companies employ **159,400 workers in Minnesota**, equating to 6.3% of total private sector employment (USTR, 2025).
 - **Manufacturing Strength:** **38% of these jobs are in manufacturing** (59,300), a sector where German firms excel (Global Business Alliance, 2025)
 - **U.S. Context:** German companies support **859,900 U.S. jobs** and contribute **~12% of total U.S. FDI**, heavily concentrated in manufacturing and R&D (German Business USA, 2025)
 - **European Context:** Exports from Minnesota to the European Union totaled \$4.1 billion, with the Mankato MSA alone contributing \$316.6 million.
-

2. German Companies and Connection Case Examples

Company	Location	Impact & Highlights
Bosch	Owatonna	Logistics & distribution hub, integrating R9 into global supply chains.
Rolls-Royce Power Systems	Mankato	Advanced engine & power system production; high-skill employment.
ALDI	Faribault	Regional distribution center, long-term logistics, and food supply investment.
Siemens	Waseca	Engineering curriculum & STEM partnership with Waseca High School.
Bayer (SeedGrowth Center)	Shakopee	\$12M innovation hub for seed treatment equipment; R&D & workforce training.
Horsch	Minnesota-based	Agricultural machinery innovation supports farm technology adoption.
Schwing America	Minnesota-based	German-owned industrial manufacturing, construction technology & service.

3. Regional and Policy Significance

Economic Development:

German affiliates contribute to the **local tax base, job creation, and business/labor retention.**

Innovation & Workforce:

Programs like **Siemens Waseca** and facilities like **Bayer Shakopee** demonstrate how **global knowledge flows enhance local talent and technology.**

Global Connectivity:

These firms link Southern Minnesota to **international supply chains**, boosting **regional competitiveness.**

Policy Opportunity:

By continuing to **attract and support German and international companies**, R9 can:

- Diversify its economic base.
 - Enhance **rural innovation capacity.**
 - Strengthen **resilience to global market shifts.**
-

4. Suggested Next Steps for Stakeholders

1. **Promote Success Stories** – Showcase R9’s German investment and relationships to bring further investment and maintain existing partnerships.
 2. **Leverage GACC & State Programs** – Engage German-U.S. trade networks for recruitment, partnerships, and exchanges in knowledge, ideas, and advancements.
 3. **Develop Regional FDI Strategy** – Identify priority sectors for economic efficiency and community development and engage in outreach with stakeholders, planning organizations, workforce, and industry leaders.
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Prepared by: Region Nine Development Commission (R9)

Date: July 25, 2025

Key Sources:

USTR (2025); Global Business Alliance (2025); German Business USA (2025); Bayer CropScience (2015); GACC Midwest (2025).

U.S. Trade Representative. (2024). *Minnesota*. United States Trade Representative.
<https://ustr.gov/map/state-benefits/mn>

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Lessons from Europe: Exploring innovation in transportation, trades, and research partnerships

Lessons from Europe: Exploring innovation in transportation, trades, and research partnerships

*August 6, 2025***By Kyle Shelton, CTS Director**

In late June, I traveled to the Netherlands and Germany to connect with peer research units and join an economic development delegation with Minnesota's [Region Nine Development Commission](#) (RNDC).

While in the Netherlands, I visited the cities of Utrecht and Maastricht. In Utrecht, I connected with the [Dutch Cycling Embassy](#) and learned more about how the organization works internationally to support building more effective bike networks. Then in Maastricht, I met with colleagues at [Maastricht University](#), which included discussions with researchers in the science, technology, and society program and a deep dive into transportation policy and decision-making.

At the [Brightlands Institute for Supply Chain Innovation \(BISCI\)](#), I learned how staff are working with academic, industry, and public partners to tackle big questions related to freight and the supply chain. This discussion also dovetailed nicely with CTS's "[Unpacking Freight](#)" theme, and I hoped to gain some insights into how BISCI structures its program. One surprising takeaway was how similar the economy of the three-country area of the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium is to that of Minnesota. Both possess large concentrations of and strengths in medical



Bike lanes in Utrecht, the Netherlands

technologies, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing, as well as close connections and collaborations with major research universities. CTS and BISCI will continue to explore how to strengthen supply chain research and partnerships with industry housed in both locations.

Related Resources

- [Article: Open house offers inside look at Mankato Regional Airport](#)
- Transportation Policy and Economic Competitiveness Program: [Industry Clusters and Freight Infrastructure](#)
- [Unpacking Freight: From Producers to Front Doors](#)

After my short visit to the Netherlands, I joined [Nicole Griensewic](#), CTS's outgoing Executive Committee chair and RNDC executive director, in Aachen, Germany, for the delegation's trip. Co-hosted by the city and region of Aachen and the [Aachen Center for Innovation and Technology Transfer](#) (AGIT), the delegation was an opportunity to deepen the connection between RNDC, the North Rhine Westphalia State of Germany, and the City of Aachen. In addition to the University of Minnesota and RNDC, the delegation included representatives from Mankato State University; the south-central cities of Le Seur, Saint Peter, Saint James, and New Ulm; Brown County; the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; New Ulm Utilities; and Ever-Green Energy.

The site that had the most impact on me was the [Aachen Research Airport](#), where private aviation companies, the major Aachen universities, and public agencies at the local and national level combine to support advanced aviation research and development. The airport provided an exemplary model of how such entities could work together to build an advanced ecosystem for innovation. Together with representatives from Mankato State, who have a close working relationship with [Mankato Regional Airport](#) through its pilot training and aviation curriculum, I'm excited to explore emulating such a model with Minnesota airports and bringing U of M expertise in aerospace engineering and other fields into the fold.

I also enjoyed getting a glimpse into the training model Germany uses to support people interested in joining a range of trades, from carpentry and masonry to baking and hair styling. On a visit to the Chamber of Crafts and Skilled Trades ([Handwerkskammer Aachen](#)) site in Simmerath, we learned more about how the program—a collaboration between private companies and public funding agencies—helps address critical workforce needs and prepares students to master a trade. This site included yet another innovative collaboration between

academic research and a trade in the form of the mass timber center. Led by architecture professors from RWTH Aachen, this program prepares students to work in the innovative fields of mass timber production and construction while also allowing research on the technology to evolve through rigorous testing.

Throughout both legs of the journey, I experienced a range of transportation infrastructure and am grateful to have brought multiple lessons home to Minnesota for CTS and our partners to explore!



The RNDC delegation in Monschau, Germany, with the city's mayor. Photo: Dan Dinsmore/RNDC

Stories on Related Topics

Terms & Abbreviations

ACC – American Connection Corp	MAPO – Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization
ACE - Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship	MCLA – Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs
APPR – Annual Performance Progress Report (CEDS) 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 on Center
CPRG – Climate Pollution Reduction Grant	NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Services
CSET – College of Science, Engineering & Technology	PROTECT – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation
CSM – Climate Smart Municipalities	REDA – Regional Economic Development Alliance
CSSJ – Climate Smart St. James	REV – Rural Entrepreneurial Venture
CTS – Center for Transportation Studies	RLF – Revolving Loan Fund
DEED – Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development	RNAI – Region Nine Area Inc.
DOE – Department of Energy	RNDC – Region Nine Development Commission
EDA – Economic Development Administration	SACE – Southern Agricultural Center for Excellence
EDD – Economic Development District	SAF – Sustainable Aviation Fuel
EECBG - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant	SBDC – Small Business Development Center
GAC – Gustavus Adolphus College	SCC – South Central College
GIS – Geographic Information Systems	SCSC – South Central Service Cooperative
GMG – Greater Mankato Growth	SHIP – Statewide Health Improvement Partnership
GMNP – Greater Minnesota Partnership	SMIF – Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
HACER – Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research	SRTS – Safe Routes to Schools
IF – Initiative Foundation	SS4A – Safe Streets for All
LGU – Local Government Unit	STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program
LMI – Labor Market Information	SWCDs - Soil and Water Conservation Districts
LMI – Low-to-Moderate Income	TAC - Transportation Advisory Committee
MADO – Minnesota Association of Development Organizations	WCI – West-Central Initiative
MAPCED - Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers	TZD – Toward Zero Deaths