

ND Counties Report Budget Challenges Under 3% Cap Restriction

Counties Complete Survey Capturing Impacts of HB 1176

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

With the first year of budgeting under the 3% cap in the rearview mirror, counties indicate while they may have been able to make ends meet for 2026, they are very concerned about future budget cycles. A tax reform package passed by lawmakers in the 2025 Legislative Session restricts political subdivisions by capping annual property tax increases to 3% each year. The North Dakota Association of Counties (NDACo) developed a survey for counties to complete with the goal of capturing the impacts of the restriction on county budgets. 51 of the 53 counties responded. “This survey provides insight into how counties managed their 2026 budgets with the mandated limitations along with their outlook on how the 3% cap will impact the well-being of the county in the future,” said NDACo Government Relations Specialist Donnell Preskey during the Interim Tax Reform and Relief Advisory Committee meeting.

The survey highlights how a great majority, 90% of the counties, lack confidence that their county can meet the needs of citizens in the next five years. That’s because most counties tapped into their reserves to fund their 2026 budgets, which will deplete quickly in the cap environment. Counties reiterated that the use of reserves to fill the gap in

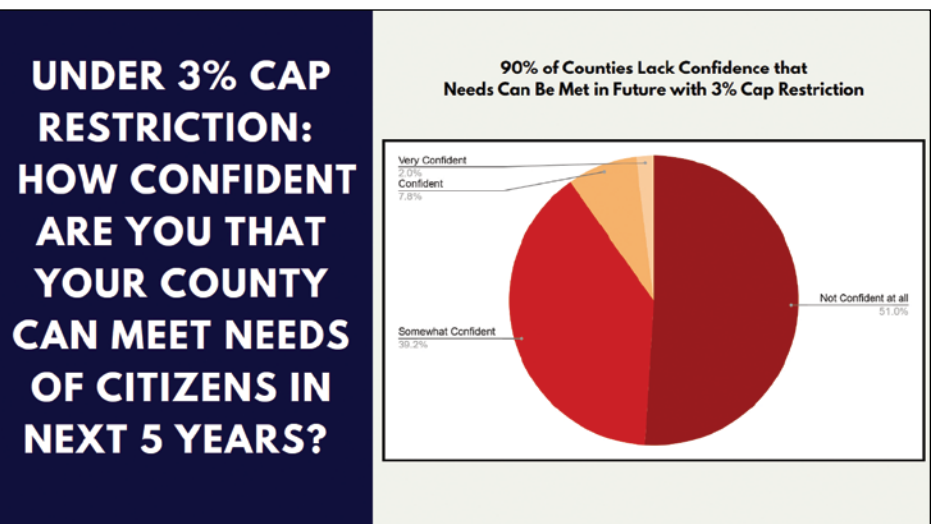
budgets is unsustainable. In dollars, the allowed revenue calculated from the 3% cap limit varies significantly depending on the property tax base a county has. For example, in Slope County, the 3% cap equaled only \$18,000 in revenue growth from property taxes compared to Cass County where the cap allowed an increase of \$1.8 million.

The legislation allows counties to carry forward unused percentages of the 3% cap for up to five years. 34 counties had a portion of the 3% that was unused, while 17 counties reported they used the full 3% allowed. Of those 17 counties, 13 of them also dipped into their reserves to fund their budgets.

Counties Make Budget Cuts

There are real fiscal impacts as a result of the property tax limitation. Numerous counties reported a loss in funding where levies are tied to state grants, with road funding seeing the greatest impact. Counties also reported that they were forced to defer equipment purchases. Overall, counties prepared their 2026 budgets to the best of their abilities, but the comments and results of the survey illustrate a bleak outlook for budgeting and planning in the future. Counties indicated they made

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Rolette County Selected to Participate in Public Health Leadership Initiative

Mary Korsmo | NDSACCHO Executive Director

NACo is launching a Public Health Leadership Academy to strengthen county leadership in advancing public health. This newly created initiative will hold its first session April to August 2026. Only 12 nationwide county teams, consisting of a county elected official and a local health unit official, were chosen for this inaugural program.

Participating on the Rolette County team is Barbara Frydenlund, RN, administrator of Rolette County Public Health, and Allen Schlenvogt, chairman of the Rolette County Commission and member of the Rolette County Board of Health.

“This opportunity highlights the importance of strong collaboration between county leadership and public health professionals in addressing the needs of our communities,” said Barbara. “Through the Academy,

we look forward to learning from peers across the country, sharing our experiences and developing practical, locally driven strategies.”

The Academy will include both virtual and in-person sessions. Cohorts will learn new methods for improving health outcomes and will also develop an action plan to address a public health priority within their county. Training, technical assistance and peer exchange will be provided June 3-5 when the teams gather in Washington, D.C. Tools and resources developed from the Academy will be shared broadly.

Frydenlund serves as a member of the NACo Health Policy Steering Committee and the Healthy Counties Advisory Board. She is the current Chair for the ND State Association of City and County Health Officials (NDSACCHO).

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PRIMARY ELECTION County Candidates

- 445 Total Running for Office
- 199 for Commissioner
- 75 for Sheriff
- 70 for Auditor, Treasurer
- 56 for State’s Attorney
- 48 for Recorder or Clerk of Court

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Board Member PROFILE



Favorite thing about being a County Commissioner? Being a commissioner is a learning experience; I like to learn and use that knowledge and experience to make good decisions for my county.

Family: My wife Brenda and I own and operate The Country Store, a clothing, hardware, and general merchandise store in Powers Lake. We have three grown children and two grandchildren.

Other things you are involved in: Living in a small town you get the opportunity to be involved in a lot of things even if you don't want to! I am on the local charitable gaming board, the economic development board, a member of the Powers Lake Athletic Booster Club, a member of the Lions Club, I do play-by-play for streaming local basketball games and I am also a volunteer fire fighter and the secretary/treasurer for the fire department.

Favorite Movie or Movie Genre: The Shawshank Redemption and Lonesome Dove are a couple of my favorites.

Music: What are you listening to right now (or all-time favorite)? I love music and love listening to a wide selection of music—Seventies Country Gold, 80's Pop, Rock, Rap, Yacht Rock, almost anything, depending on the mood.

Favorite Book: Where the Red Fern Grows

Something people probably don't know about you: I received a star rating in the state music contest for vocals.

Philosophy of life and/or work: Work hard and give your time and talents to those that need it.

Favorite quote: Leadership is an action, not a position.

Anything else you'd like to add? My advice for anyone considering running for an office, whether it be with the county or any public office, is to get involved. It is a great way to learn, grow, and understand how your local government works.



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FROM the COUNTIES

County Visits a Valuable Experience

Hello everyone, I hope you are having a good start to spring! We recently visited our first set of counties for the 2026 County Tours. This was a great time to meet folks in their backyard! We started the first day with Steele and Grand Forks. The following day we went to Traill and Cass.

Some of the common topics of all four counties were how the 3% cap was affecting them and if it was sustainable in the future. The counties were the same in that they were able to make it work for the 2026 budget, but something must be done to provide required services with limited revenue in the future.

Another hot topic was the grant process for road funding. Some county projects were funded, and some were not. The counties would like to see the process streamlined to give counties a direct distribution and let them decide what project they want to fund with the dollars provided.

It was nice to see all the old courthouses still being used. They



Chad Kaiser | NDACo President
Stutsman County Sheriff

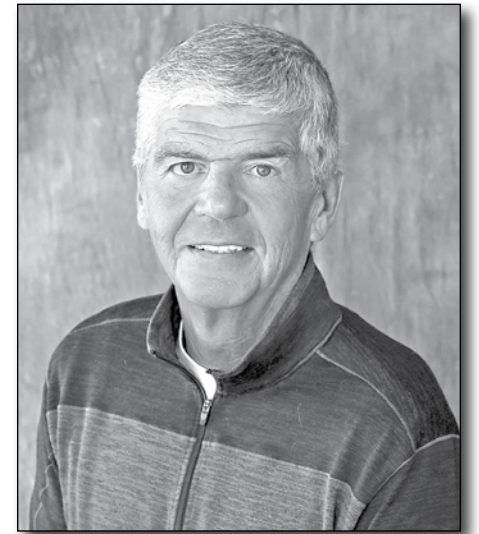
were all kept up and looked amazing. What a wonderful experience to see the architecture and learn the history of each one. We also saw the newly constructed Grand Forks County Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Andy Schneider took us on a tour of his new facility. Wow, what a great space!

FROM the COMMISSIONERS

Hitting the Road for County Tours

Greetings from Stark County! I hope this finds your year going well. It's hard to believe, but we are almost halfway through our Association year and your team in Bismarck has been busy. We had our first County Tours April 14-15. Our visits to Steele, Grand Forks, Traill and Cass Counties were all well attended and great discussions were had. These conversations are the building blocks for all of us to forward issues, ideas and dialogue with each other that will result in real progress on the issues that face county governments across our Association. Thanks to all of you who took time out of your schedules to sit down and visit with your Association. We look forward to our next tour on June 24-25 when we will visit Billings, Dunn, Golden Valley, McKenzie and Stark Counties.

The June primary candidate roll has been finalized. Early voting in some counties will start soon. Good luck to all candidates, and again, a big thank you to all who have made the decision to run for public office.



Neal Messer | NDCCA President
Stark County Commissioner

Please mark your calendars for October 11-13 for our annual meeting. The meeting committee is working hard to put on another great event and hopefully you will be able to attend!



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FROM the ASSOCIATION

Finding Strength to Lead In Difficult Times

The weather this spring was like watching two prize fighters trading punches. One day it was 75 degrees and the next day there was snow on the ground! But that is life on the Northern Great Plains where you can get knocked down one day but like all good fighters, we still get back up.

Speaking of getting knocked down, counties have been under significant pressure over the last few years, so it's understandable that might be how you feel as well. Whether it is property tax limitations, elections, crime (both prosecution and jails based), new software challenges, energy/data center development—to name just a few, it's been quite the 12 rounder. Some of this pressure has even led to the resignation of a good, community-minded county commissioner in Oliver County. Thanks to Fargo Forum Columnist Rob Port for covering this story. <https://www.inforum.com/opinion/columns/port-central-north-dakota-county-commissioner-abruptly-resigns-over-hostile-data-center-debate>.



Aaron Birst | NDACo Executive Director

Governing has not and will never be easy. No one runs for office because it is easy. Quite the opposite. As our (kind-of-adopted fellow North Dakotan) 26th President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt famously said, it is "the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error

and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause" that actually matters.

There are no perfect answers to many of the questions that confront counties and governments in general. There will always be disagreement on matters of public policy and emotions will run high, and that is okay. But all of us citizens (elected or not) must also remember the quote from the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg that "we can disagree without being disagreeable." So, for all of you out in the counties, thank you for your devotion to your communities. Take comfort in knowing, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better," it is you who are in that arena.



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2026 Primary Heavy on County Races

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

A look at the primary election races for 2026 shows that there is strong interest in folks serving in local government roles. All county offices are up for election in 2026 except for the commissioners which alternate election cycles. Here's a look at some of the highlights of the local races:

445 individuals running for county offices.
199 County Commissioner candidates with 91 incumbents seeking re-election. There are highly contested races in: Barnes (6 candidates for 3 seats), Burleigh (7 for 3), Emmons (6 for 2), Golden Valley (6 for 2), Grand Forks (8 for 3), Mercer (9 for 3), Mountrail (7 for 3), Sargent (6 for 3), Sioux (6 for 2), Traill (6 for 3).
70 candidates for County Auditor, Treasurer, Auditor/Treasurer with 44 incumbents seeking re-election. In three counties (Grant, McIntosh and Slope) there is no candidate on the ballot. Six counties have contested races: Barnes (Auditor), Billings (Auditor/Treasurer), Burleigh (Auditor), Dickey (Treasurer), Divide (Auditor/Treasurer)

and Sioux (Auditor). Nine counties have Auditors or Treasurers retiring.
75 candidates for Sheriff with 42 incumbents seeking re-election. There are contested races in 17 counties with no candidate in LaMoure County. Seven Sheriffs are retiring.
56 candidates for State's Attorney with 33 incumbents. There are contested races in five counties and no candidates in four counties (Kidder, LaMoure, Logan and Sheridan).
48 individuals are seeking the County Recorder, Clerk of Court or a combination of those positions with 33 incumbents seeking re-election. Only three counties have contested races.
 Ten counties have measures on the primary ballot with two counties (Divide and Traill) looking for authorization to become home rule counties and two counties (Hettinger and Ramsey) proposing a sales tax to generate additional revenue, three counties (Emmons, LaMoure and Wells) have measures related to levies.

COUNTY	PRIMARY MEASURES
BILLINGS	INCREASE NUMBER OF COMMISSIONERS TO 5
DIVIDE	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER
EMMONS	CONTINUE LEVYING NO MORE THAN 5 MILLS FOR EMMONS COUNTY HOSIPTAL DISTRICT
GRANT	APPOINT STATE'S ATTORNEY
GRIGGS	COUNTY COMMISSION BY DISTRICT VOTED AT LARGE
HETTINGER	INCREASE OF SALES TAX FROM .05% TO 1%
LAMOURE	MILL LEVY INCREASE FOR COUNTY EMS (up to 15 mills)
RAMSEY	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER TO USE 1% SALES, USE AND ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE TAX TO OFFSET PROPERTY TAX BURDEN OF PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS
TRAILL	AUTHORIZE HOME RULE CHARTER
WELLS	AUTHORIZE LEVY OF COUNTY ROAD & BRIDGE FUND UP TO 25 MILLS

Counties Required to Implement ADA Standards for Websites

Amber Schriock | Service Manager, NRG Tech Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, was the result of decades of advocacy to ensure civil rights and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Over the years, there have been changes and additions defining disabilities and compliance requirements. While most people may think of ramps and automatic door openers, we'd like to highlight a more technical aspect - specifically state and local government agency websites, social media, forms and online documents. On April 24, 2024, regulations for Title II of the ADA were published with specific web content requirements to enable access for people with disabilities. The Department of Justice chose WCAG 2.1 Level AA (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines developed by the World Wide Web Consortium) as the technical standard.
 History lesson aside, updating web content helps to provide equal access

for more members of the community, giving them the opportunity to utilize government service programs and participate in civic or community events. This isn't going to happen overnight. Compliance requirement dates vary by government size based on 2020 census data. Most of North Dakota counties fall under the compliance date for public entities with a total population of less than 50,000 which is **April 26, 2028**. Governments with 50,000 or more have until **April 26, 2027**. It's important to note that the Department of Justice ruled in April to extend the compliance deadline for one year.
 There is no one-size-fits-all solution; many organizations utilize different vendors to host their website and publish content. Even if you have a small team or limited resources, you can start small, focusing on the important aspects. Reach out to your website vendor and ask them to verify your level of ADA

compliance. They should be able to tell you what aspects need to be updated. Some examples would be alternative text for images, adjusting poor color contrast, captions on videos, and keyboard navigation. Uploaded documents from the past, and online documents moving forward, will need to be updated to newer versions as well. Some exceptions do exist.
 NDACo/ILG has been working with the ND Insurance Reserve Fund, ND League of Cities, and other key partners in local government to raise awareness and provide broad guidance and resources for ADA website compliance. A training webinar series is in the works and details will be available soon. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has taken the approach of scrubbing documents and images from their website in favor of posting only required documents in plain text to meet the first deadline. They will update

and upload the compliant versions after the deadline.
 One thing to consider when making ADA compliance changes: document all updates. This can be useful for tracking and managing the changes as well as showing commitment to meeting ADA compliance standards if a legal challenge arises. A common recommended practice is to provide an easy-to-find accessibility statement on your website with contact information so people can report accessibility issues. Usually in a website footer, this statement helps identify issues that may have been missed and allows you to provide information in another way to the person who reported the issue while you fix the problem.
 Website guidance can be found on the following websites:
<https://www.ada.gov/resources/web-guidance/>
<https://www.ada.gov/resources/2024-03-08-web-rule/>

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RECAP: 2026 HR Collaborative Engage 360 Conference

Kori Bowen | NDIRF Marketing & Communications Specialist

In April, over 170 North Dakota local government HR professionals and supervisors gathered at the Bismarck Hotel & Conference Center for two days of growth and professional development. The 2026 HR Collaborative Engage 360 Conference featured experts who presented the topics most important to government HR teams in North Dakota.

Some highlights from the 2026 HR Collaborative Engage 360 Conference include:

- **The Power of 360 Engagement:** Award-winning speaker and author Devin Hughes spoke about the importance of human connection at work.
- **Building Your HR System Series:** North Dakota Human Resources and Development Consultant Tanya Wieler held a series of presentations covering topics including compensation, benefits, performance management, and more.
- **Keeping It Legal Panel:** North Dakota law experts from NDIRF, NDACo, and NDSBA held a panel discussion that covered the importance of fair business practices, documentation, and more.

Thank you to everyone who made the 2026 HR Collaborative Engage 360 Conference a success! The sponsors, speakers, organizers, and attendees truly showed the importance



of supporting and educating HR teams in North Dakota local government.

NDIRF looks forward to hosting the HR Collaborative Summer Webinar Series in 2027 – more details to come!

Join the HR Collaborative for FREE!

The HR Collaborative's commitment to its members is to strengthen human resource management within North Dakota local governments by providing affordable training and resources to meet the specific needs of local government HR professionals.

National Association of Counties Leadership Development: Learn from the Best

Congratulations to our January 2026 graduates!

Join over 15,000 county leaders already benefiting from the effectiveness of the NACo Leadership Academy, the 10-week, online leadership program founded by General Colin Powell.

We want to acknowledge and congratulate the North Dakota graduates:

- Alex Kiser, Assistant State's Attorney, Cass County
- Anna Ingersoll, Assistant State's Attorney, Cass County
- Ethan Lee, Assistant State's Attorney, Cass County

Enrollment is now open for our July 2026 cohorts!

Join us in investing in the workforce – empowering them to become better leaders today and into the future. To learn more and enroll visit <https://edge.naco.org/naco-high-performance-leadership-academy/>.

Developed by General Colin Powell, the Professional Development Academy and NACo, the High Performance Leadership Academy is an online 10-week program that helps your workforce develop fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and our residents.

HR Collaborative membership is **FREE** for all North Dakota local governments. The membership form is available at www.NDIRF.com > HR Collaborative or scan the QR code on this page.

Contact HRCollaborative@ndirf.com with any questions.

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Institute of Local Government Upcoming Webinars

The Institute of Local Government has been providing quality education services since 1995. ILG has continuously grown to meet the changing needs of local government officials, and now offers a large selection of topics for non-government participants as well.

- **May 06, 2026**
NDIT Cybersecurity Tools and You
- **May 06, 2026**
Got 15?! Office of State Tax Commissioner Monthly Webinar-MAY
- **May 11 & 12, 2026**
Vision Zero Partner Conference (Bismarck)
- **May 13, 2026**
CEG Monthly Safety Moment: Worst Case Scenario – Tornado
- **May 13, 2026**
ADA Accessibility Training Webinar Series
- **May 20, 2026**
Best Practices for ArcPro and ArcGIS Online
- **May 27, 2026**
Leading During Turbulent Times: Culture as the Root Cause of Claims, Loss and Liability

To register go to: www.ndaco.org/ilg

Celebrate Counties and NDACo GIS Program

Kaitlyn Bakken, NDACo GIS Coordinator

April is not only County Government Month, but it also marks the completion of another year for the GIS Program; two of my favorite things! I understand that my world is all GIS and county government; my motivation is to alleviate. Ultimately, my goal is to create a space where our folks that work with GIS have a common ground to compare what they're doing and have an opportunity to learn from and with one another.

Through the work with the State Parcel Program, GIS is a part of many county functions, and it can feel quite daunting. It's important to know that there are resources and groups available. One of my personal favorites is the MidAmerica Geospatial Consortium (MAGIC); the group is comprised of leaders in the region from education to state and local government. MAGIC is an important network to be a part of because their monthly meetings allow for each state, regional and federal coordinators to share what they are doing and compare workflows.

In closing, I understand that we're all doing more with less and technology



changing quickly can make GIS feel like it's just another thing on the list. But I encourage you to join and participate in a standing committee, reach out to your

own resident GIS person for another perspective, and try to find new ways to incorporate geospatial information into your day-to-day work.

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Why Buckling Up is ND's Smartest (and Sweetest) Habit

Kaitlin Atkinson | Vision Zero Outreach Coordinator – Northeast

Every time you get behind the wheel or hop into a vehicle, buckling your seatbelt is one of the simplest yet most effective actions you can take to protect yourself and everyone on the road. In North Dakota, where long rural drives and variable weather are part of daily life, seatbelt use isn't just smart, it's essential. An annual survey of observed seat belt use in North Dakota shows that about 8 out of every 10 people (79.8%) wear a seat belt. Here are the top reasons why wearing a seatbelt should be a non-negotiable habit.

1. Your First Line of Defense in a Crash

Seatbelts serve as a vehicle occupant's primary protection during a collision. Without one, even a seemingly moderate crash can have devastating consequences. For example, if you weigh 125 pounds and are traveling at just 30 miles per hour, your body will slam into the interior of the vehicle with a force equivalent to 3,750 pounds if unrestrained. That's like being hit by a small elephant; far more than the human body can withstand. A seatbelt keeps you secured to the vehicle, dramatically reducing the risk of ejection or catastrophic impact.

2. Proper Positioning for Other Safety Features

Modern vehicles are packed with advanced safety technologies like airbags, crumple zones, and reinforced structures. However, these features work best when you're in the correct position. A seatbelt holds you firmly in your seat so that airbags can deploy effectively and other systems can do their job. Without it, you might be thrown forward, sideways, or out of position, rendering those lifesaving features far less effective, or even harmful.

3. Spreading and Gradual Slowing of Impact Forces

In a crash, the forces on your body are intense and sudden. Seatbelts protect you by distributing the impact over a wider area, primarily across your strong pelvic bones and chest, rather than concentrating it on vulnerable spots like your head or abdomen. They also allow your body to decelerate more gradually along with the vehicle, giving your internal organs a better chance to avoid severe trauma. This "ride-down" effect significantly lessens the chance of life-threatening injuries to the brain, heart, lungs, and other organs.

4. Keeping Occupants in Their Own Space

Crashes don't just involve impact with the outside world; unrestrained occupants can become dangerous projectiles inside the vehicle. A seatbelt prevents you from colliding with other passengers (or them



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with you), keeping everyone in their designated seating area. This reduces the risk of secondary injuries caused by people being thrown around the cabin, which can turn a survivable crash into a tragedy for multiple people.

5. It's the Law in North Dakota

In North Dakota, wearing a seatbelt is not optional, it's required by state law. Under North Dakota Century Code (NDCC 39-21-41.4), every person in the vehicle, regardless of age or seating position (front or back), must be properly buckled up. This is a primary enforcement law, meaning law enforcement can pull you over and issue a citation solely for not wearing a seatbelt. Fines apply, and the driver can be held responsible for unbuckled passengers. Beyond the legal consequences, complying with the law simply makes good sense for your safety.

One of the most enjoyable ways North Dakotans are embracing seatbelt safety is through the popular "Click It for Coffee" events organized by Vision Zero North Dakota. These fun community gatherings partner with local law enforcement and coffee shops across the state, where drivers who proudly show they're buckled up receive discounts or promos at their favorite shop! It's a positive reminder that buckling up not only keeps you and your loved ones safer, but it can also start your day with a smile and a great cup of coffee. Check the Vision Zero ND website for upcoming dates and participating locations and turn your next coffee run into a feel-good celebration of smart, responsible driving.

The numbers don't lie. Nationwide, seatbelts reduce the risk of fatal injury by about 45-60% for front-

seat occupants, depending on the vehicle type, and cut serious injuries roughly in half. They have saved tens of thousands of lives over the years. In a state like North Dakota with many miles of open highway, the margin for error is slim, but buckling up gives you and your loved ones the best possible chance of walking away from a crash.

Wearing a seatbelt takes just a second but can make the difference between life and death, minor injuries and severe ones, or a simple ticket and much worse. It's your first and best defense, it maximizes your vehicle's other safety systems, protects your body and your passengers, and keeps you on the right side of the law in North Dakota. Make it a habit today: click it before you shift into drive. Your future self, and everyone riding with you, will thank you.



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CEG Team and Cass County Sheriff's Office Work Together on Helmets

Michael Casey | CEG Underwriting & Loss Control Manager

The County Employer Group (CEG) at NDACo was excited to get involved when the phone rang from Detective Lance Kitzen of the Cass County Sheriff's Office. Detective Kitzen heard about the NDACo CEG ergonomic and safety initiative and was inquiring about the opportunity to get some help with purchasing new motorcycle helmets for the Cass County Sheriff's motorcycle department.

As it turns out, motorcycle helmets have a certain use life and the Cass County team's helmets were a couple years past that extended use life. CEG started the process by contacting Super Seer Corporation out of Evergreen Colorado, who are leaders in the motorcycle helmet industry.

Lance and the team decided on a Seer lightweight carbon fiber helmet, gold with brown high trim, black visor, black patent leather with gold rank band and "S" button (signifying Sheriff). The new helmets are much lighter than the previous helmets, which is an important detail for the rider, and a big reason why the team decided on the carbon fiber helmets.

The Cass County Sheriff's motorcycle team received their helmets this winter and are excited to get out on the road with them. We here at NDACo CEG are happy to be a part of keeping them safe and looking good at the same time.



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North Dakota Signs Honoring Fallen Peace Officers on Display

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

Drive Highway 200 in North Dakota and you will likely spot a symbol of honor and reflection. The highway which stretches across the state from the Minnesota to Montana lines is now known as the North Dakota Fallen Peace Officers Memorial Highway. The 69th Legislature approved a bill to dedicate Highway 200 as such and provide funding for the ND Department of Transportation to erect signs along the 300-plus miles of roadway to memorialize fallen officers.

In Mercer County, this has an even deeper significance, as Highway 200 is

where Deputy Paul Martin was killed in 2023 as he was trying to stop a fleeing suspect. Martin's sign is placed at Mile Marker 146, the location where he died.

Fourteen signs have been installed with more planned to go up starting this spring. There are currently 37 requests for signage with two signs posted in each direction.

North Dakota's 69 fallen peace officers will be remembered and honored during a memorial service May 14th at 7 p.m. in Memorial Hall at the State Capitol.

NDLTAP Helps Maintain Gravel Roads to Improve Safety and Costs

NDLTAP

With more than 65% of North Dakota's 106,000 miles of roadways surfaced in gravel, it is no wonder that gravel road maintenance is an important focus of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute's ND Local Technical Assistance Program (NDLTAP).

"We live in a rural state with about twice the number of registered vehicles as licensed drivers, noted NDLTAP Director Bryon Fuchs. "Consequently, North Dakota doesn't have the revenue or the traffic volume to pave many of its roadways." In fact, only about 17,000 miles of the state's roads are hard surfaced. Of the remaining 89,000 miles, about 70,000 miles are gravel surfaced.

Those gravel roads need maintenance to keep them in safe driving condition. Washboards, raveling, float, excessive dust, and loss of aggregate into ditches are all concerns. In the past two years, NDLTAP held 27 training events across the state where 364 participants learned about gravel quality, motor-grader operator training, pulling gravel shoulders, and dust control to help their local counties and townships address those issues.

"Training local road agencies of the proper way to maintain gravel surfaced roads and the importance of using quality gravel is improving safety and saving taxpayers money," Fuchs said. "And that's a win-win for the traveling public in North Dakota."

"NDLTAP training is an important addition to our county's highway department," Morton County Engineer John Saiki said. "Our employees always have positive comments after attending the training sessions. The training is current, relevant to their work, and presented in a positive, engaging way. We depend on NDLTAP to assist in making our employees safer, more productive, and valuable."

The training also improves safety for employees as well as the traveling public, according to Corey Olson, director of member services for the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund. "Consistent training is a crucial component of risk management for all entities, regardless of their size," he said. "It keeps employees, citizens, and visitors safe on our North Dakota roads. The motor-grader training provided through NDLTAP is top-notch, hands-on training that is critical for every county highway department's risk management program. Claims consume time, money, and productivity, regardless of fault. The key is to keep those to a minimum, and this course (motor-grader operator training) is a great way to achieve this."

Any county can request training by visiting the NDLTAP website: <https://www.ndltap.org/training/request.php>.

Contact for Motor-Grader Operator Training: Denise Brown, denise.brown.1@ndsu.edu, 701-220-0101.



ND Counties Budget Challenges

Continued from page 1

budget cuts in several areas including: salary increases, employee retirement benefits, road projects, equipment purchases and capital projects. These cuts highlight challenges counties see as they prepare for the next budget cycle and into the future. These challenges include depleting reserves, being unable to provide adequate and competitive salary increases, putting off large projects including maintaining or repairing county buildings. The financial pressures are only compounded by the fact that counties experience inflation costs greater than 3%.

The legislation allows local governments to exceed that 3% cap if voters approve it in the general election. NDACo is not aware of any counties bringing this issue to their voters in 2026.

NDACo Offers Future Considerations

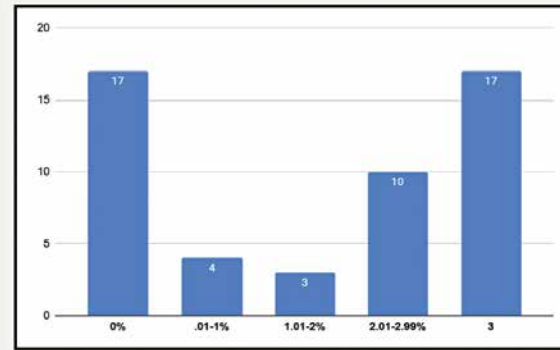
NDACo offered a list of future considerations for lawmakers as they prepare for the 2027-28 Legislative Session. Many of the suggestions were related to expanding exemptions for the 3% cap. The primary exemption suggested is for health care premiums,

as NDPERS is set by the state and saw a 15% increase in rates from the last biennium. Other suggested exemptions include elections, corrections, and unfunded state mandates. NDACo also brought to lawmakers' attention that under current law, prior voter approved levies are subject to the 3% cap, something that may have been an oversight. Other proposals NDACo highlighted were adjusting the 3% cap either to reflect inflation or to a higher percentage, creating a public safety levy authority, eliminating current mill rate limitations, providing a state appropriation for programming costs associated with tax statement requirements and providing additional state revenue sharing.

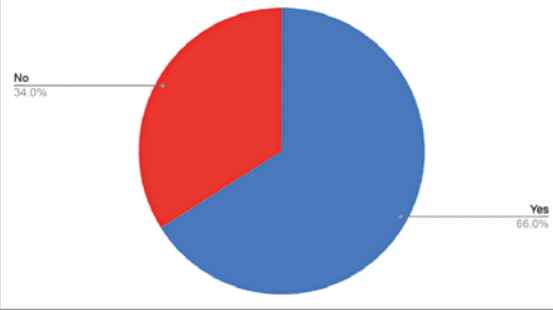
NDACo also flagged for the committee a list of technical items that should be addressed next session that have been identified by counties when implementing HB 1176, the property tax relief and reform legislation.

Several other local government associations provided similar testimonies to the committee including the League of Cities, School Boards Association and Township Officers Association.

PERCENTAGE OF UNUSED CAP TO CARRY FORWARD



Did you use reserves to cover 2026 budget expenses?



RESERVES

33 Counties
Used Reserves to Fund
2026 budget

13 Counties
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Allowed Under 3% CAP

20 Counties
Used Reserves +
Forwarded % of
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NWTIRE.COM Northwest Tire Keeps You Rolling Down The Road.

County Tours Kick Off 2026 Visits

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

The NDACo County Tours is an annual ritual that started decades ago and is one of the most meaningful ways to see and hear from county officials across the state. The first of the 2026 County Tours was held in mid-April. NDACo President and Stutsman County Sheriff Chad Kaiser, NDCCA President and Stark County Commissioner Neal Messer along with NDACo Executive Director Aaron Birst, NDACo Government Relations Specialist Donnell Preskey and NRG Account Manager Dwight Driscoll traveled to four counties in eastern North Dakota. Stops included visits to the counties of Steele, Grand Forks, Traill and Cass.

The 3% cap on property tax revenue was the most talked about topic in all counties with county officials urging NDACo to seek options to provide additional flexibility or exempt particular expenses counties have little to no control

over. Counties are required to provide many services, such as law enforcement. They are concerned about the quality of service to provide safety and security to citizens could be compromised if further improvements to the limitation are not achieved in the 2027 Legislative Session.

One of the greatest highlights of the on-site visits is touring the county courthouses and seeing their uniqueness. The Steele County Courthouse will be celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. County officials and staff are busy getting the courthouse ready for the celebration June 13th. In Grand Forks County, major renovations are now complete that fixed the dome and leaking roof. We also got a look inside the new Sheriff's Office on the south side of Grand Forks. The Traill and Cass County courthouses were both built in the early 1900's and are a display of majestic history.



Cass County



Traill County



Grand Forks County



Steele County



North Dakota Sheriffs Coordinate Flag Sojourn 250 Event

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

A special U.S. flag made its stop in North Dakota on its journey across the country as part of the America250 celebration. The North Dakota Sheriffs and Deputies Association (NDSDA) played a major role in coordinating the North Dakota visit and ceremony held at the Burleigh County Courthouse on March 19th. During the only stop in North Dakota, military honor guards helped give the flag a patriotic celebration.

“Sojourn 250 is a national event to honor the 250th Anniversary of our country and to remember the men and women of this great nation that have served in our armed forces and have sacrificed at different levels to ensure our freedom and world peace,” commented Burleigh County Sheriff Kelly Leben.

Flag Sojourn 250 started at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., on June 14, 2025. The flag traveled to 26 U.S. military cemeteries in 10 foreign countries and all U.S. territories before returning stateside to the United States. The flag continues its journey, traveling into 37 states before reaching the states of the original 13 colonies and ultimately arriving back in Washington, D.C., for Independence Day 2026, the 250th birthday of our nation.

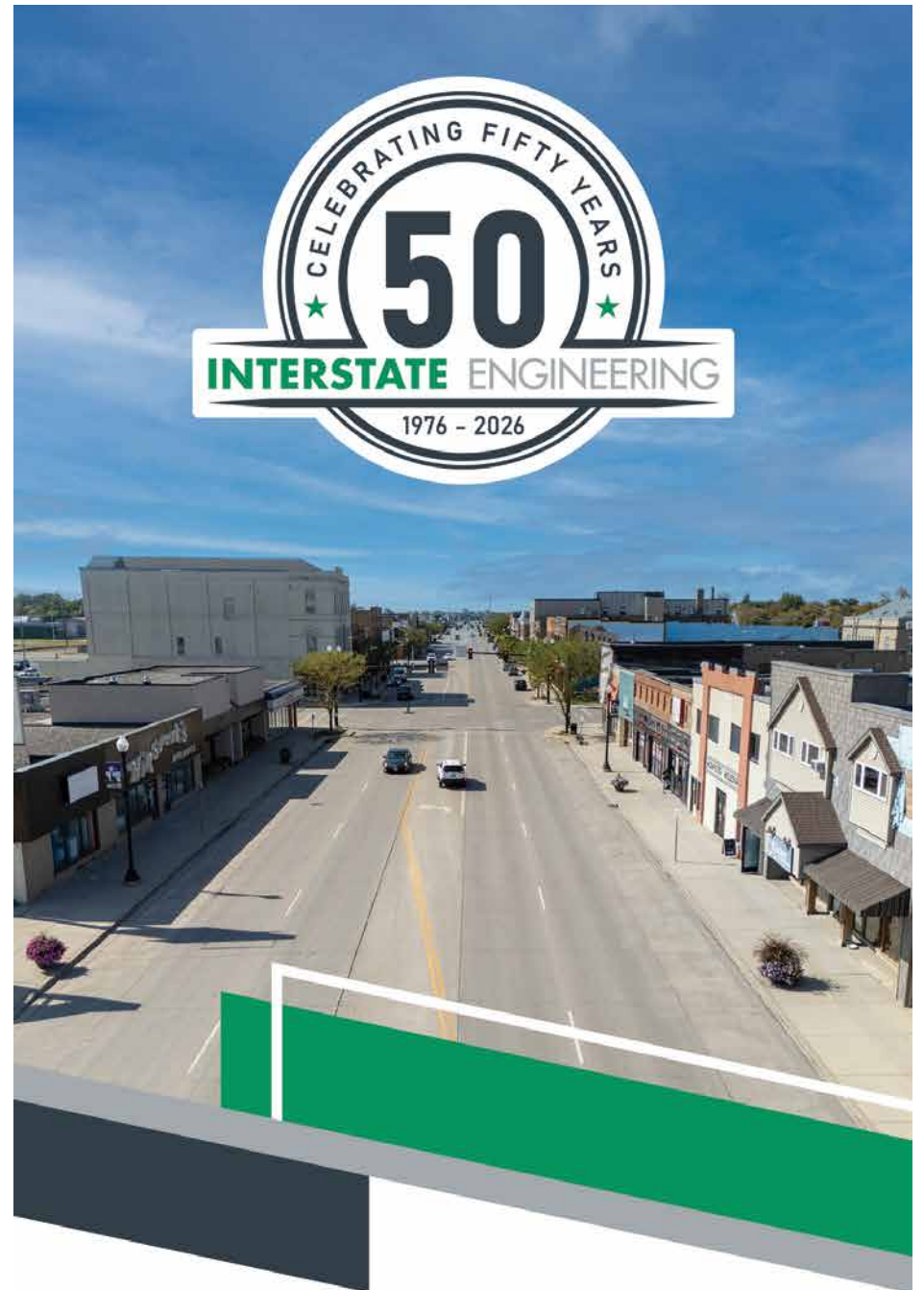
As you can imagine, a project like this takes great coordination. The United States Postal Service along with the National Sheriffs’ Association worked with sheriffs’ associations across the U.S. to identify who the flag could be delivered to and where it could be flown for its short time in each state. NDSDA coordinated with the Burleigh County



Sheriff’s Department on the March event.

Leben concluded the ceremony with a powerful statement, “Tonight, before the hour of darkness, this flag will be lowered without fanfare, much like the military service of so many veterans who have served this great nation in our 250 years, and once again resume its travel across our nation.”

The flag was mailed to Montana to continue its journey.



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Get Ready to Vote June 9 | NORTH DAKOTA SECRETARY OF STATE

Submitted by North Dakota Office of Secretary of State

The next election is always the most important election, and so it is time to prepare for the Primary Election on June 9! Voting is a simple, yet powerful way for people to choose who represents them and weigh in on decisions. In the Primary Election, the two county office candidates receiving the most votes advance to the General Election ballot.

Secretary of State Michael Howe encourages eligible voters to make a plan to vote and learn about the choices to prepare for the June 9 Primary Election.

MAKE A PLAN TO VOTE

North Dakota offers options for a voter to cast their ballot: absentee, early in-person at a polling location (if offered by the county), and in-person at a polling location on Election Day.

Voter ID

North Dakota's Voter ID Law applies to all voting methods. Voters should ensure they have one of the following forms of identification: North Dakota driver's license or non-driver ID, long-term care certificate, tribal ID or tribal letter. Digital versions of North Dakota driver's licenses and identification cards cannot be used for voting.

Voters should ensure their ID is up to date before an election. Information on updating an ID address is available in the *Forms of Voter ID* section of the North Dakota Secretary of State website at vote.nd.gov.

Voting In Person

The North Dakota Secretary of State's My Voting Information portal at vote.nd.gov/myvotinginfo has information to help voters learn about their in-person voting options. By entering their address, a voter can see their polling location details, including hours of operation and whether early voting is offered.

Voting Absentee

North Dakota voters are never mailed a ballot without first requesting one. Voters must submit a completed absentee ballot application to their county auditor.

Each Board of County Commissioners has the option to designate their county as a vote by mail county. If the Board of County Commissioners does not designate its county as a vote by mail county, the county is an absentee county. The only difference between vote by mail counties and absentee counties is how the voter receives their application for a ballot. In vote by mail counties, the county auditor



mails a ballot application to all active eligible voters. In absentee counties, voters must request an absentee ballot application from their county auditor or fill out and print the application by going to vote.nd.gov/myvotinginfo.

After the auditor receives the application, they will review it for completeness and verify identification before mailing a ballot to a voter. Completed ballots can be returned by mail through USPS, by placing it in a county drop box (if offered by the county), or by taking it to the county auditor's office. Ballots must be received by close of polls on Election Day to be counted.

BE AN EDUCATED VOTER

Understanding the candidates and issues on the ballot will help voters make choices based on what is important to them. Sample ballots specific to a voter's address can be accessed online in the My Voting Info portal (vote.nd.gov/myvotinginfo).

At the end of April, the North Dakota Office of the Secretary of State mailed eligible voters educational information about the statewide measure that will be on the 2026 Primary Election ballot. It is an easy-to-understand summary of the measure, its fiscal impact, the method the measure was initiated by, and an objective analysis of what a vote in favor and a vote opposed means. The information that was mailed is also available on the North Dakota Secretary of State website and will be at polling locations.

Here are a few reminders when filling out a ballot:

- Voters can choose to skip voting for a particular race or measure.
- Voters can vote for fewer than the number indicated for a race. For instance, if the race says to choose two candidates, it is okay if a voter only selects one.

- In a Primary Election, voters must vote for candidates in a single party for partisan races. If someone votes for candidates in different parties, the partisan races on the ballot will not count, but all other correctly marked races and ballot measures will count.

SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT VOTING WITH OTHERS

Civic engagement takes teamwork, and the Office of the Secretary of

State has made it easy for businesses and organizations to share voter-related information with others. The nonpartisan online Make an Impact Voter Engagement Toolkit (vote.nd.gov/impacttoolkit) contains shareable educational information about North Dakota elections, including handouts, flyers, and a link to North Dakota Elections 101 videos.

On the toolkit page, there is an option to subscribe to receive election-related information throughout the election year. This includes reminders about voting dates and deadlines, new toolkit materials, and actionable ways to share voting information. There's also a form to request that Secretary Howe speak to a business or organization about elections and voting.

Every election is an opportunity for voters to shape the future. An informed vote is a powerful vote. Citizens can have their voices heard by making a plan to vote, learning about who and what they are voting on, and encouraging others to do the same. Together, we can strengthen our communities, counties, and state through civic engagement.

 An advertisement for AES2. It features a portrait of Miranda Kleven, PE, AE2S Special Projects Engineer, on the left. On the right, the text reads: "Seeing your needs from a financial PERSPECTIVE". Below this is a quote: "Financial plans are more than just about money. They're really about education and providing you with the knowledge you need to make the best decisions for your community." The quote is attributed to Miranda Kleven, PE, AE2S Special Projects Engineer. At the bottom right is the AES2 logo with the website www.ae2s.com and the tagline "Engineering and Beyond Award-Winning Best Place to Work".

Purchasing Pulse: Do Your Due Diligence

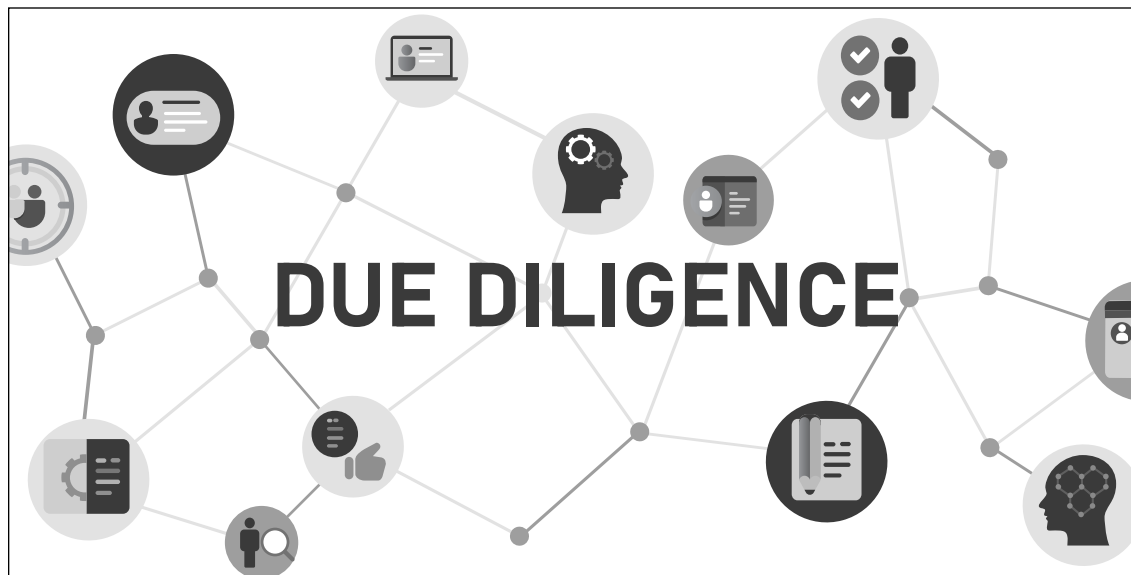
Sherry Neas | Office of Management and Budget Shared Services Director

In your personal life, you “do your homework” when you are buying something. Your research, compare features and prices, and check reviews. If you are buying a car, you test drive and may have your mechanic check over a used car. If you are buying a house, you may hire a house inspector. In your personal life, you get enough information to be confident you are making a good decision.

In public procurement, a similar process is followed to make sure we are spending taxpayer dollars wisely and complying with applicable laws.

Merriam-Webster defines “due diligence” as “research and analysis of a company or organization done in preparation for a business transaction.” In public procurement, the evaluation process requires a thorough evaluation of 1) the **responsibility** of the vendor offering the goods or services, and 2) the **responsiveness** of the bid or offer to the stated requirements.

In considering whether a vendor is responsible, the procurement process may consider whether the vendor is a regularly established business, properly registered with the North Dakota



Secretary of State, possessing any required licenses or credentials. Confirming responsibility commonly includes asking for references and speaking with previous customers to ensure company performs quality work, on time, and within budget. Consult your legal counsel if you discover evidence that a vendor may not be responsible such as documented, recent nonperformance, law violations or lack of required licenses.

Similarly, “due diligence” is evaluating responsiveness. In bidding situations, requirements stated in specifications are “go/no-go.” If a feature, functionality or specific service is required, the procurement office or evaluation committee needs to confirm that the offered bid complies with those requirements. Manufacturers normally have product literature that can be compared to the specifications. For services, the procurement officer should confirm that the bid or proposal includes all requirements.

If a price appears to be unreasonably low compared to other bids or proposals received, it is best practice to confirm that the bid or proposal complies with all requirements. Maybe the vendor has really “sharpened their pencil” to win the bid. A “too good to be true” price may be an indication that the vendor is offering something of lower quality or has made a mistake.

If conducting a Request for Proposal (RFP) process and evaluating which proposal is most advantageous considering quality and cost, thoroughly document the evaluation of each received offer with a justification for the awarded evaluation points.

Documentation of “due diligence” is important. Remember, documents received or created during the procurement process become subject to open records laws.

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Butler 

NDSU Ready to Launch Pest Management Tool to ND Farmers

North Dakota State University experts have developed a new app to help farmers in the field.

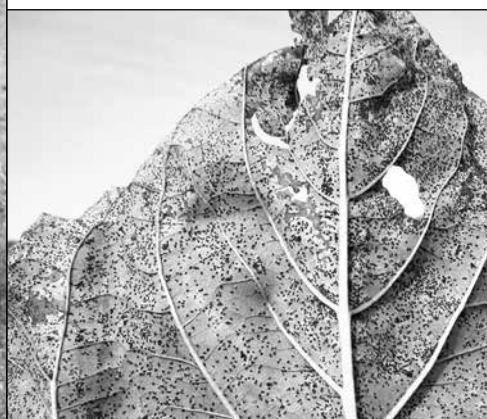
The upcoming NDSU Pest Management Tool has been designed to be a hub for pest management knowledge, which can help agriculturists easily access information wherever and whenever they need it.

This wasn't the first app built for this purpose. The previous app was launched in 2013. Two years ago, the app was dissolved due to the high cost to maintain, and a more sustainable plan was put into action with NDSU Agricultural Data Analytics.

NDSU Extension produces three guides each year for fungicides, insecticides and herbicides. They are some of the most requested Extension publications, with thousands printed each year.

Andrew Friskop, plant pathologist in NDSU's Department of Plant Pathology, Microbiology and Biotechnology, has been working on making this tool a one-stop shop for anything related to pesticide use information. His goal was to consolidate all three guides into a usable database that agriculturists can use.

"One of the biggest challenges in Extension is making information



that can be received by all ages," says Friskop. "We do a great job at reaching our experienced agriculturalists. Some of the new generation of future agriculture leaders have been working with those growers to determine how to best provide information in a one-stop shop at their fingertips."

The tool has taken about two years to create, and it required collaboration from NDSU Extension experts in entomology and plant sciences to help re-enter all the available data about pest management.

None of the previous app language was usable, so Vimlesh Kumar, NDSU Extension application development

and analytics engineer, developed the app from scratch.

"The previous version was very basic, and it wasn't fully integrated with the data from the guides," says Kumar.

The new app follows a progressive web app format, meaning it is easily added to a device and doesn't require costly updates. Also new to the tool is an extensive gallery of crop photos to accompany the information, which Kumar says is a crucial part of the app's usability.

"I think the most important thing for users is the visual and usability of the tool," says Kumar.

Users can select the crops and pests, and the tool will provide effectiveness

and use information. The app provides detailed product information, application methods and up-to-the-minute environmental conditions such as temperature and humidity. The app can be used without an internet connection on a smartphone, as well as in a desktop format.

Friskop says that, at the end of the day, he and the collaborators on this tool just want to make the day easier for growers and to guide decision-making wherever they need it most.


Printed copies of the pest management guides will continue to be available at Extension county offices.

The tool is set to launch in late spring 2026, and Friskop is excited to showcase the team's hard work, as well as hear what growers have to say about their app experiences.

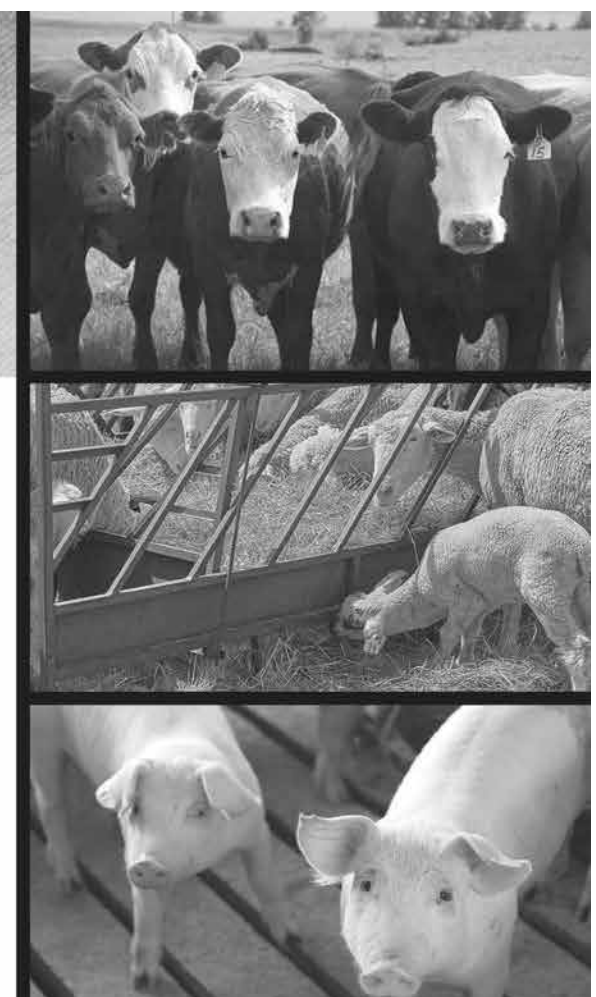
"We really look forward to getting feedback on everything included, whether it's accessibility or additional tools that would be helpful to add," says Friskop.

This management tool has been financially supported by commodity groups.

For more information, contact Andrew Friskop at 701-231-7627 or andrew.j.friskop@ndsu.edu.



North Dakota
Livestock Alliance
ndlivestock.org



The North Dakota Livestock Alliance is a non-profit organization led by farmers and ranchers focused on transparency with North Dakota's Counties about:

- The economic and community benefits to welcoming livestock operations to your county
- What to expect when a livestock operation is proposed in your community
- State and local livestock zoning procedures
- Modern livestock management, barn design and environmental stewardship

Contact us or invite NDLA to your next County Commission meeting at ndlivestock.org or 701-712-1488 Follow us on Facebook @LivestockND

Editor's Note: BRIEFS are collected from newspapers throughout the state over the past two months. Counties with news items to include in future issues are encouraged to submit them to ndaco@ndaco.org.

A new employee policy is being implemented in **McLean** County to support ambulance volunteerism. The policy allows an employee to utilize 40 hours of leave to volunteer on the ambulance service. A county employee has made a request to utilize the new policy. The goal of the policy is to encourage employees to participate in providing voluntary ambulance service when needed. "I think as a county we should do whatever we can to encourage participation," said Commissioner Steve Lee.

– *Central McLean News Journal*

Hettinger County Commissioners have approved a ballot measure asking voters to consider a half-cent increase in the county sales tax. The measure will be on the June 9 primary election ballot. The half-cent sales tax for a total county sales tax of 1 cent is to help fund countywide and citywide policing as well as emergency services within the three communities of Hettinger County. The current sales tax was approved by voters in 2016. However, the county still needs to use property taxes rather than having policing funded completely with the sales tax. Should the measure pass, the increased sales tax collection would start in January 2027 and be dispersed in 2028.

– *Hettinger County Herald*

Voters in **Traill** County will be asked to weigh in on a home rule charter at the polls in June.

The Traill County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a resolution placing the proposed charter on the June 9 ballot. The county board's vote on the resolution followed a public forum. During the hour-long forum, county commissioners and Traill County State's Attorney Charlie Stock outlined the driving forces and advantages of making Traill County a home rule county. Stock said those advantages include giving Traill County the power to draft ordinances – including ones for zoning – and the ability to ask voters to consider a countywide sales tax in the future.

– *Hillsboro Banner*

The **Logan** County Commission has adopted a resolution on the county state's attorney position to be on the November ballot. Currently the Logan

County state's attorney position has been held in an unfilled elected capacity, requiring regular county appointment to fill the position. Commissioners said they would like to hire and appoint the most qualified candidate for the position, whereas they need to place the issue of converting the attorney position to an appointed position from an elected position, on the general election ballot for the people of the county to vote. After discussion the resolution to place on the ballot as measure #1 was approved.

– *Napoleon Homestead*

Walsh County proceeds with plans to build a 46-bed jail facility. According to the bid package, the cost of the project is not to exceed \$23.6 million, which also includes selective demolitions. Commissioners discussed financing options for the facility. "What's our main goal? Is it to reduce the sales tax as much as possible? Is it to use our maximum reserves to put toward the jail project? Is it to reduce the capital fund levy?" asked Commissioner Kristi Brintnell. Sheriff Ron Jurgens said currently the county has 12 prisoners. Eleven of them are being housed in Grand Forks County and one in Pembina County.

– *Walsh County Record*

Eddy County has officially signed a contract with State Radio, now formally known as the State Emergency Communications Center (SECC) for 9-1-1 services beginning January 1, 2027. Eddy County will be the 28th county to contract 9-1-1 services to the SECC. The county will need to use an office deputy and/or set up an after-hours call tree to address all non-emergency administrative calls, as the SECC does not handle those. The county also needs to hire a 9-1-1 coordinator.

– *New Rockford Transcript*

Billings County Commissioners voted to approve alcohol sales at the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library when it opens. The sale of beer and wine was approved in specific areas in and around the Library that will allow representatives to apply for the necessary liquor license as the official opening is nearing.

– *Billings County Pioneer*

A potential change to the county's New and Expanding Business Tax Incentive Policy inspired discussion among **Grand Forks** County Commissioners about how other tax incentives may be approached by the

county in the future, and what might be excluded. The proposed change to the policy would adjust the five-year stepdown schedule for the incentive. Currently, it starts with a 100% tax incentive for participating businesses and goes down by 20% each year after, ending with a 20% incentive at Year 5. The updated policy would instead start with an 80% incentive and end with a 10% incentive. "This has come from multiple discussions," County Government Relations Manager Gracie Lian said during Tuesday's meeting. "This is just coming to the commission to hear your thoughts on what's been proposed for the New and Expanding Business Tax Incentive Policy." The policy is only open to primary sector businesses, or those that provide services that add value to another product, service or process and create more wealth. Along with being presented as the proposed updated policy, commissioners were also asked if they wanted to consider any other tax incentives like PILOTs (payment in lieu of taxes) or TIFs (tax increment financing) that last longer than five years. Commissioner Terry Bjerke said he has no interest in the county pursuing tax incentives for more than five years, especially pointing out the county's financial issues and how tax incentives would cut back on potential property tax revenue. "We cannot eliminate our new growth and then expect to pay our bills," he said. No decisions about the updated new and emerging business policy or the other tax incentive programs were made during the meeting.

– *Grand Forks Herald*

A **McIntosh** County Commission meeting drew the largest crowd in decades as residents filled the courtroom to weigh in on wind-energy development and zoning rules. After more than an hour of testimony, the commission voted to enact a one-year moratorium on wind-energy development and later expanded it to mirror Logan County's moratorium, adding solar and data-center projects. The meeting centered on public comments regarding a wind project and the county's recently adopted three-mile setback for wind turbines, solar facilities and data centers. Speakers offered sharply differing views on the setback ordinance and Ørsted Energy's request for a one-mile exception.

– *McIntosh County Star & Tribune*

Dunn County Commissioners have voted to draft a revision to an employee policy related to storm days and severe

weather. The proposal was spurred by a resident's concern voiced during public comment about county employees receiving pay despite arriving late or not reporting to work during severe weather. Commissioners acknowledged the concern and signaled interest in revisiting the policy. Commissioner Craig Pelton said employees should be paid on storm days, but those who do not report to work during severe weather should not be paid.

– *The Dickinson Press*

Grand Forks County Commissioners voted to approve agreements with neighboring counties of Nelson and Cavalier to house inmates at the Grand Forks County Correctional Center.

– *Grand Forks Herald*

The Grand Forks Military Compatibility Committee held an inaugural meeting to review the newly created legislation allowing for military impact zones. The bill's purpose is to create impact zones around military installations and form committees that will help oversee any potential development in those zones to avoid detrimental impacts on military operations. **Grand Forks** County Administrator Tom Ford participated in the meeting. A similar meeting was also held in Minot.

– *Grand Forks Herald*

Rolette County Sheriff's Office and local emergency response agencies partnered with the St. John school on a school intruder drill. "Everything went as planned, I thought the drill went very well for our school system," said Dr. LaVallie. "There were a few things that could have went different, but for the most part I thought our staff did their part, making sure all safety protocols were followed." School shooter drills are intended to enhance safety by training staff and students in emergency protocols — such as locking doors, hiding, and building good muscle memory for crisis situations — ultimately reducing confusion. The drill in St. John certainly showed that school staff were diligent and made sure the important safety protocols were followed as instructed.

– *Turtle Mountain Times News*

Billings and Golden Valley counties are holding joint meetings to figure out how the two counties can tackle the widening and rerouting of Buffalo Gap Road together. The effort is seen as mutually beneficial for a

Continued on page 19

Understanding the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program

Sally Holewa | ND State Court Administrator

There are currently 37 counties that have “five or fewer” attorneys located in the county. Many of these are older attorneys who no longer practice law full time. This shortage of attorneys creates a lack of service in many important areas.

Attorneys in rural areas may serve as a district court, municipal court or tribal court judge, state’s attorney, city attorney, public defender or legal services attorney. They may serve as court-appointed counsel in juvenile, mental health or civil commitment of dangerous sex offender cases. They may serve as counsel for a school board, church or business. They may have a private law practice that deals with adoption, agricultural law, criminal law, divorce, estate planning, guardianship, probate, real estate or any of the other legal issues that may crop up in a person’s life.

To address the shortage, the legislature created the rural attorney recruitment program in 2021. The program provides payment of \$45,000 distributed evenly over a period of 5 years to those attorneys who live and work in an eligible county or city. The cost is split between the state (50%), participating community (35%) and the State Bar Association (15%). For a county or city that equates to \$15,750 spread over 5 years.



While the original program was based on population size, there were two important changes made to the program this past session. Senate Bill 2211 expanded the purpose of the program to include retention of attorneys currently residing in an eligible county or city. Additionally, the legislature replaced overall community population as the threshold requirement for eligibility with a threshold requirement of having five or fewer attorneys living or working within the community. These changes created an opportunity for more communities to qualify for the program while ensuring the focus remains on rural areas.

For more information, contact Kelly Hutton at khutton@ndcourts.gov or visit <https://www.ndcourts.gov/rural-attorney-recruitment-program>.

County News Briefs CONTINUED

From page 18

variety of reasons – both economic and functional – and could even alleviate travel for those wishing to visit the Petrified Forest north of town. Costs and resources could be split between the two counties. “Whatever will provide us better access to the rest of our county, and save miles and time and provide access to the Petrified Forest and other parts of our county, then – whether it’s fire or rescue or people headed to the Maah-Daah-Hey Trail – we’re going to see what it could potentially cost and whether both counties can afford it, and that’s kind of the step where we’re at,” said Commissioner Steven Klym.

– *Billings County Pioneer*

Kidder County Commissioners and the County’s Zoning Board have given the go-ahead to the construction on a new five-shop condominium. The condominium will be located on the northern edge of Steele near the Coffee

Cup Travel Plaza off I-94. The county also granted a Conditional Use Permit to allow the commercial property to include the option of residential dwelling. Construction is scheduled to begin in May.

– *Steele Ozone and Kidder County Press*

Foster County has created a committee to look at a potential “snagging and clearing” project for the Carrington and Kelly Creeks. Two commissioners along with two members from the water board will form the committee. Generally speaking, a snagging and clearing project involves removing trees, debris and vegetation from streams and banks to improve the flow of water. However, whether such a project will ultimately be pursued by the county is still unclear.

– *Foster County Independent*

North Dakota Attorney General's Opinions

These and all other Opinions issued by the ND Attorney General’s Office can be seen at: www.attorneygeneral.nd.gov/opinions-search/.

CITY OF MANDAN

Opinion #: 2026-O-07

Date Issued: March 23, 2026

Issued To: City of Mandan, ND

Request: Whether the City of Mandan violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by failing to respond to an open records request within a reasonable time when the city provided prior notice and alternative means of communication before blocking an email address.

Conclusion: The City of Mandan provided the requester with notice and alternative means to make open records requests before blocking his email address. As such, the City of Mandan did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 in this instance because it had no obligation to respond to a request that it did not receive.

You can view this opinion at www.attorneygeneral.nd.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-O-07.pdf.

GRAND FORKS POLICE

DEPARTMENT

Opinion #: 2026-O-08

Date Issued: March 23, 2026

Issued To: Grand Forks Police Department

Request: Whether the Grand Forks Police Department violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by initially denying a request for records under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.7 on the basis that the records constituted active criminal investigative information.

Conclusion: The Grand Forks Police Department did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by denying the requested records because the records constituted active criminal investigative information under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.7.

You can view this opinion at www.attorneygeneral.nd.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-O-08.pdf.

JUNE PRIMARY

Important Dates for Voters

NOW

Can request an absentee ballot application

APRIL
20

Vote by mail counties mail out applications to voters

APRIL
30

Ballots mailed to voters who submitted an application

JUNE
9

Absentee or vote by mail ballots must be received by close of polls

JUNE
9

Primary Election Day

Work delay due to hitting a pipeline while digging

4½ days

Time it takes to call 811 before you dig

4½ minutes

—

Would you rather your time is saved or wasted? The fact is, you put a lot of time, thought, and effort into making every job perfect. But when you skip calling 811, you run the risk of hitting a pipeline or another underground infrastructure, placing your life in serious danger. Don't take shortcuts.

Call 811 before any digging project.

Visit enbridge.com/call811 for more information.



Rethinking Employee Performance Appraisals in Local Government What a Survey of Cities Reveals About What’s Working—and What Needs to Change

LeaderGov, a consulting and training firm for local governments, released findings from a multi-city survey examining how municipalities are managing employee performance appraisal systems and shifting toward more continuous feedback and development-focused practices.

Employee performance evaluations remain one of the most important—and debated—systems in local government. When done well, they reinforce values, clarify expectations, and support growth. When done poorly, they become a compliance exercise with little real impact.

LeaderGov surveyed multiple cities to understand how appraisal systems function in practice. Responses revealed a wide range of approaches—from traditional annual reviews to more continuous, feedback-driven models.



1. Annual Evaluations Remain the Norm—but Are Evolving

Most cities still rely on annual evaluations, typically structured as:

- Anniversary-based reviews
- Citywide cycles tied to fiscal years or merit increases
- Hybrid models for union and non-union employees

While these systems provide structure, they often create administrative complexity. Some cities are beginning to shift toward continuous feedback models, while others emphasize timely completion as their primary strength.

In conclusion, annual reviews remain standard but are increasingly seen as just one part of an ongoing performance conversation.

2. Competencies Are Common—but Must Be Focused

Nearly all cities evaluate employees using defined competencies tied to organizational values such as teamwork, accountability, and service. Many also differentiate competencies for:

- Public safety
- Supervisors and managers
- Senior leadership

Some cities have reduced the number of competencies to improve clarity, while others struggle with overly complex systems that lead to rushed evaluations.

The key takeaway is that competencies are only effective when they are limited, clear, and thoughtfully applied.

3. Leadership Expectations Are Not Always Reinforced

Most cities acknowledge that

supervisors should be evaluated differently, using:

- Separate forms or sections
- Leadership-specific competencies
- Distinct expectations for senior roles

However, some still apply the same criteria across all employees. Several respondents emphasized that incomplete or overly generous evaluations can become a liability.

Ultimately, leadership expectations must be clearly defined and consistently evaluated to have impact.

4. Employee Participation Is Limited

In most cities, employees play a minimal role in the process:

- Meeting with supervisors
- Reviewing and signing evaluations
- Adding optional comments
- More interactive approaches—such as collaborative goal setting or regular dialogue—are less common. Self-evaluations are also rare.

In short, most systems still evaluate employees rather than actively engage them in their development.

5. Goal Setting Is a Key Differentiator

Cities vary widely in their use of goal setting:

- Some require goals for leaders or non-bargaining employees
- Others encourage but do not mandate them
- Some limit goals to performance improvement plans (PIPs)

One city described a stronger model where goals are developed collaboratively, tied to training, and supported through future budget planning.

The key insight is that goal setting shifts evaluations from backward-looking reviews to forward-looking development conversations.

6. Regular Check-Ins Are Encouraged but Rarely Required

Most cities recognize the value of ongoing check-ins but stop short of requiring them. Practices include:

- Encouraged but informal conversations
- Required check-ins for PIPs or probationary periods
- Check-ins tied to training completion

A few cities have formalized regular 1:1 meetings and report stronger communication and trust.

In conclusion, performance improves when feedback becomes routine rather than annual.

7. Technology Helps—but Leadership Drives Results

Some cities use platforms like NeoGov to automate evaluations and track completion, while others rely on manual systems. Across all approaches, respondents agreed that technology does not guarantee meaningful evaluations. More important factors include:

- Supervisor accountability
- Clear expectations
- Quality of conversations

The bottom line is that technology supports the process, but leadership determines its effectiveness.

8. Separating Pay from Performance Improves Credibility

One city reported improved outcomes after removing merit increases from the evaluation process. This led to:

- More honest conversations
- Less pressure to inflate ratings
- Greater focus on development

A key takeaway is that separating compensation from evaluation increases trust and usefulness.

Final Reflections

Several clear themes emerged across cities:

- Systems are generally sound but inconsistently executed
- Supervisor capability is the biggest variable
- Employees want more frequent feedback
- Goal setting and development increase effectiveness

The future of performance appraisals in local government is less about forms and more about leadership habits, clear expectations, and ongoing dialogue.

When performance management becomes a continuous conversation rather than a once-a-year event, organizations build stronger cultures of accountability, trust, and growth.

For more information, contact Bill Stark, LeaderGov at Bill@LeaderGov.com or 678-833-4310.

Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) Grants Now Available Quick Turnaround Deadlines Set

Mary Korsmo | NDSACCHO Executive Director

Rural Health North Dakota Health and Human Services (NDHHS) has announced several new RHTP grant opportunities. Counties are encouraged to check out these grant opportunities to explore if there are projects in their county that could be a fit for the funding. North Dakota was awarded \$199 million year one of the five-year program. Future awards will be hinged on the success of the grant applications and awards in 2026. Below is a summary of the available grants. Further details can be found at: <https://www.hhs.nd.gov/rural-health-transformation/funding>.

Zero-Hour Physical Education (PE) Initiative (Make North Dakota Healthy Again)

- Deadline to apply: May 22, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Funding eligibility is restricted to North Dakota's rural and tribal, public and private schools, regional education associations and/or school consortiums.
- Technical Assistance Conference Call: May 4 at 3:30pm CT
- Approximately \$700,000 in year one, estimated 10 awards of roughly \$70,000 each

Community Gardens Project

(Make North Dakota Healthy Again)

- Deadline to apply: May 22, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Funding eligibility is open to leaders of North Dakota's rural and tribal communities, including but not limited to 4-H youth development programs, civic groups, municipalities, tribal councils, tribal colleges, tribal health departments, health care facilities, senior centers, worksites, public health units, schools, Head Start programs, cultural centers, after-school programs, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, communities of faith and nonprofit organizations.
- Technical Assistance Conference Call: May 5 at 3:00pm CT
- Approximately \$300,000 in year one, estimated 10 awards of roughly \$30,000 each

Community-Based Walking Program (Make North Dakota Healthy Again)

- Deadline to apply: May 22, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Funding eligibility is restricted to North Dakota's rural and tribal communities.

- Groups that are encouraged to apply include, but are not limited to, tribal programs/tribal partners, hospitals, cultural centers, communities of faith, municipalities, chambers of commerce, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, parks and recreation, libraries, nonprofit organizations, public health units, civic groups and community centers. It is also conceivable that an entire community could join to apply for one of these grants with many of the groups listed above partnering together to deliver this program.
- Technical Assistance Conference Call: May 6 at 3:00pm CT
- Approximately \$2,500,000 in year one, estimated 20 awards of roughly \$125,000 each

Behavioral Health Promotion

Community Grants (Make North Dakota Healthy Again)

- Deadline to apply: May 29, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Applicants may include hospitals, clinics and home care providers; tribes and tribal health organizations; other health care providers; local public health units; political subdivisions (including law enforcement agencies such as police and sheriff departments); nonprofit organizations; education systems (K-12 public and private schools, regional education associations, higher education institutions, Area Health Education Center, etc.); community organizations (faith-based entities, libraries, youth programs and coaches, etc.); child care providers.
- Technical Assistance Call: May 7, 2-2:45pm CT
- Approximately \$1,600,000 is available in year one, estimated 10 awards of roughly \$160,000 each

Expand Rural Health Care Rotations

(Strengthen and Stabilize Rural Health Workforce)

- Deadline to apply: May 15, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Eligible applicants may include hospitals, clinics and home care providers; long-term care facilities; behavioral health providers; tribes and tribal health organizations, excluding Indian Health Services; emergency medical services providers; other health care providers; local public health; nonprofit organizations; education systems.

- Technical Assistance Call: May 7, Noon-12:45pm CT
- Approximately \$3,000,000 in year one, estimated 15 awards of roughly \$200,000 each

Train In Place (Strengthen and Stabilize Rural Health Workforce)

- Deadline: May 15, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Eligible applicants may include hospitals, clinics, and home care providers; long-term care facilities; behavioral health providers; tribes and tribal health organizations, excluding Indian Health Services; emergency medical services providers; other health care providers; local public health; non-profit organizations; education systems.
- Technical Assistance Call: May 6, Noon-12:45pm CT
- Approximately \$2,025,000 in year one, estimated 15 awards for roughly \$135,000 each

Rightsizing Health Care Delivery Systems for the Future: Rural Federally Qualified Health Centers and Critical Access Hospitals

(Bringing High Quality Care Closer to Home)

- Deadline: May 22, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Funding eligibility entities include rurally located critical access hospitals (CAHs) and their owned and operated clinics; rurally located federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and their owned and operated clinics; one application per system can be submitted.
- Technical Assistance Call: May 7, 11-11:45am CT
- Approximately \$2,310,000 in year one, estimating 42 awards of \$40,000 each

Ensuring Safety Net Service Delivery

(Bringing High Quality Care Closer to Home)

- Deadline: May 29, 2026, at 5:00pm CT
- Applicants must serve rural or tribal North Dakota residents and may include hospitals, clinics and home care providers; long-term care facilities; behavioral health providers; tribes and tribal health organizations; emergency medical services providers; other health care providers; transportation providers; local public health; nonprofit organizations; education systems; community organizations.



- Technical Assistance Call: May 8, Noon-12:45pm CT
- Approximately \$15,000,000 in year one, estimated 50 awards roughly \$300,000 each

Applicable to each grant opportunity:

- The technical assistance call will be recorded and posted on the RHTP webpage for later viewing. Additional resources related to this funding announcement, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will also be published on the RHTP webpage after the call.
- All funds must be fully expended by September 30, 2027.
- All application components must be submitted through Qualtrics.
- For RHTP funding opportunities, the entities within the cities of Grand Forks, Fargo, West Fargo and Bismarck are considered urban and do not qualify for RHTP funding opportunities unless the population served by the grant applicant is at least 50% ND rural citizens or the focus of the grant funding will be used for ND rural citizens.

The Federally created RHTP administered by CMS is a five-year program to improve rural health care access, quality, and sustainability. North Dakota's application focused on four initiatives: Strengthen and Stabilize Rural Health Workforce; Make North Dakota Healthy Again; Bring High-Quality Health Care Closer to Home; and Connect Technology, Data and Providers for a Stronger ND. The first grant application was released on March 18, 2026, due April 30, 2026, and made available to the Critical Access Hospitals. The local public health units self-organized into 13 regional service groups and have small contracts currently under review.

Additionally, contracts to provide community coordination and technical assistance have been issued to North Dakota's eight regional councils. Application notices for the Connecting Technology, Data and Providers for a Stronger ND pillar are coming soon.

Cass County Swears in New Community Outreach Comfort Dog

Cass County Sheriff's Office

The Cass County Sheriff's Office is excited to announce the addition of its first Community Outreach Comfort Dog. Deputy K-9 Finn was officially sworn in as a deputy and will serve alongside his partner, Deputy Jolene Fletcher. Deputy Fletcher has completed specialized training to serve as K-9 Finn's handler.

K-9 Finn is a 14-month-old Labrador Retriever from Whispering Pines Family Kennel, LLC in Milaca, MN. K-9 Finn completed his training with Performance Kennels, Inc., in Buffalo, MN. K-9 Finn is obedience trained and known for his calm, laid-back demeanor. He enjoys belly scratches and spending time with people, making him a natural fit for comfort and outreach work.

K-9 Finn will support the Sheriff's Office through a variety of outreach and response roles, including community engagement events, school programs, crisis intervention and support during critical or traumatic incidents and investigations. In addition, K-9 Finn will also provide support for staff wellness within the office.

"K-9 Finn represents the strong partnership we have with the communities we serve," said Sheriff Jesse Jahner. "This program was made possible through the

generosity of local organizations and community members, along with the Cass County Commission, who believe in the importance of connection, compassion and support. K-9 Finn will help us build positive relationships, engage with residents of all ages and provide comfort during times when it's needed most. We are grateful for the community support that made this possible, and we are excited to see the impact K-9 Finn will have throughout Cass County."

K-9 Finn has already had a positive impact on the community. During his first shift, EMS, Fire and the Cass County Sheriff's Office responded to a medical call involving a young child. An older sibling who was on scene during the traumatic situation was removed from the situation and was visibly upset. Deputy Fletcher and K-9 Finn spent time with the child, and what started with tears turned to giggles as the child interacted with K-9 Finn. Moments like these highlight the important role K-9 Finn will play in providing comfort and support to individuals during difficult situations while strengthening community connections.

The Community Outreach Comfort Dog program was made possible through



generous donations from community partners, including:

- Turf Tamers – Mike Svaleson
- Members of the Davenport Fire Department
- Community of Grandin, ND

- Cass County Electric Cooperative Foundation

The Cass County Sheriff's Office looks forward to the positive impact K-9 Finn will have across the community.

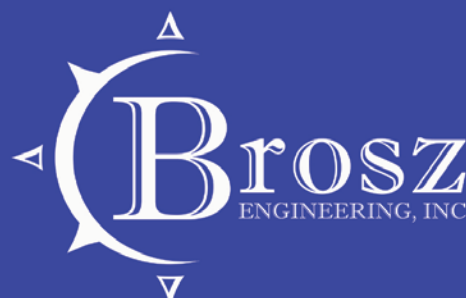
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2026 COUNTY CALENDAR

MAY

- 1-31 _____ Mental Health Awareness Month
- 10 _____ Mother's Day
- 11-12 _____ Vision Zero Partner Conference, BSC National Energy Center of Excellence
- 13-14 _____ ND Clerks of Court Association Annual Meeting, Coteau Room, Capitol
- 14-15 _____ ND Sheriffs & Deputies Association Meeting, Burleigh Morton Detention Center, Bismarck
- 19-21 _____ Williston Basin Petroleum Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 25 _____ Memorial Day (State Holiday)
- 27 _____ Human Services Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol

JUNE

- 2-4 _____ Dakota Conference on Rural and Public Health, Alerus Center, Grand Forks
- 9 _____ Primary Election
- 10 _____ Water Topics Overview Committee, Roughrider Room, Capitol
- 14 _____ Father's Day
- 16-18 _____ ND County Recorders Association Conference, Hampton Inn, Grand Forks
- 17 _____ Agriculture and Water Management Committee, NDSU Memorial Union, Fargo
- 17-19 _____ ND State's Attorneys Association Summer Conference, Holiday Inn, Fargo
- 21 _____ Father's Day
- 23 _____ *Tentative* – Tax Reform and Relief Advisory Committee
- 24 _____ Budget Section, Senate Chamber, Capitol
- 24-25 _____ County Tour to Billings, Dunn, Golden Valley McKenzie and Stark Counties
- 25 _____ *Tentative* – Government Finance Committee

JULY

- 4 _____ Independence Day
- 9-10 _____ ND County Auditors & Treasurers Association Conference, Radisson Hotel, Bismarck
- 14-16 _____ ND Human Service Zone Directors Annual Meeting, NDACo County Office Building
- 17-20 _____ NACo Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA



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