



East Central Regional  
Development Commission

100 Park Street South  
Mora, MN 55051  
[ecrdc@ecrdc.org](mailto:ecrdc@ecrdc.org)

Phone 320 679 4065  
Fax 320 679 4120  
[www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org)



**WORK PROGRAM**  
**FISCAL YEAR 2020 - 2021**

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Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, and Pine Counties

**July 1, 2020**

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### **Overview**

The East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) represents one of thirteen development regions in the State of Minnesota. It covers the counties of Pine, Kanabec, Isanti, Chisago, and Mille Lacs in East Central Minnesota. Referred to as *Region 7E* in state statute, it covers a land mass of approximately 3,400 square miles. The ECRDC was formed by a petition of local units of government in 1973 under the authority of the Regional Development Act of 1969. The ECRDC serves as Region 7E's official regional development organization. It provides a number of services in the areas of transportation, economic development, and community development. The governing board of the ECRDC includes 24 members as stipulated in the Regional Development Act. Included are representatives from county boards, city councils, township boards, tribal government, school boards, and public interest.

Programs of the ECRDC include: Revolving Loan Fund; Transportation; Regional Transportation Coordination Council, Safe Routes to Schools, and Community and Economic Development.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The East Central Regional Development Commission's mission is to provide leadership and direction through creative problem solving. We do this by initiating projects and programs that lead to creative solutions to regional problems, by providing technical assistance and by identifying and developing available resources. Our mission is to provide a leadership role as an advocate for East Central Minnesota to bring about positive change.

### EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION STAFF

Robert Voss.....	Executive Director
Brenda Hughley .....	Finance Officer
Karen Onan .....	Regional Transit Coordination Council Director
Ashley Eckdahl .....	Transportation Management Coordination Center
Trish Rydlund .....	Information/Office Manager
Penny Simonsen .....	Transportation Planning Director
Jordan Zeller.....	Economic Development Director

## ADMINISTRATION

**OBJECTIVE I** - Provide general support services and resources that enable the East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) to effectively fulfill its responsibilities as a regional service organization and advocate for local units of government and residents of the Region.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Prepare/provide materials including meeting minutes, agendas and issue information needed to conduct meetings of the full Commission during FY2020-2021.
2. Provide, as resources permit, opportunities for Commission members to participate in activities that will enhance their knowledge and skills relative to issues and work activities of concern to the Commission and the units of government it represents.
3. Provide policy recommendations to the Commission that will, when adopted, utilize resources available to the Commission to best meet the needs of units of government and residents of the Region.
4. Develop and implement a budget that utilizes available resources in the most efficient and effective fashion.
5. Establish and maintain adequate accounting and financial management procedures including provision of bi-monthly status reports to the Commission and program staff, contract for and complete fiscal year-end audit of Commission financials in accordance with applicable government accounting standards.
6. Provide the full Commission with periodic work program progress reports and information/ recommendations pertaining to future direction.
7. Implement and monitor the adopted personnel policies of the Commission and make recommendations as needed to keep said policies consistent with staff needs of the Commission.
8. Conduct periodic meetings with agency staff to ensure programs and activities are coordinated and that information is disseminated.
9. Prepare and recommend a fiscal year work program and budget to be considered and adopted by the Commission at its annual meeting held in June of each year.
10. Provide direction and grantsmanship assistance to Commission staff in an effort to obtain funding to support programs.
11. Explore funding possibilities, resources permitting, to expand RDC services.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Numbers of Commission meetings held; training opportunities made available to Commissioners; implementation of an approved work program and budget; number of funding proposals completed and submitted; amount of funds raised to support needed programs; recruitment and retention of qualified staff; carrying out of basic administrative functions.

### **IMPACT**

Successful completion of these work elements will enable the Commission to fulfill its responsibilities and maintain current levels of service and/or provide additional services within the Region.

**OBJECTIVE II** - To carry out a program of public information, which markets services and keeps residents of the Region and elected officials informed about Commission programs and services.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Maintain a website at [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org) and employ social media to highlight the Commission's accomplishments and inform the public on available programs and services.
2. Provide the news media with appropriate news releases and articles pertaining to issues and subjects of interest to the area.
3. Develop individual program marketing methods and distribute to groups targeted for services.
4. On or before September 1 prepare an annual report, which includes a statement of all receipts and expenditures for the year just ended and a preliminary budget for the new year. The report shall also include descriptive information about major activities and accomplishments of the Commission during the past year and new initiatives/work program for the new year.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Updates to Commission website, utilization of social media, number of news releases issued, and contracted services resulting from program marketing strategies. Publication and distribution of an annual report to appropriate units of government and when requested by the public.

### **IMPACT**

Completion of the above activities will increase awareness of Commission activities and services. It should also expand the market for Commission services and fulfill Commission obligations under the Regional Development Act.

**OBJECTIVE III** - Carry out activities which promote the Commission, the Region, and which furthers the Commission's ability to provide quality services in the Region.

**WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Support and participate in activities of the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO).
2. Work with the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) in addressing services, programs, and state legislation that best meets the needs of the regions in rural Minnesota.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The amount of regional input/participation in MADO activities; success in drafting new RDC legislation and obtaining increased funding.

**IMPACT**

Successfully carrying out these activities will enhance the Commission's ability to serve the region and function as the focal point for issues of regional importance.

## TRANSPORTATION

**OBJECTIVE I** - To implement a regional transportation planning program that establishes priorities and policies for the region which address the transportation needs of Region 7E.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Provide staffing and coordination for the Transportation Program/Transportation Advisory Committee including mailings, meetings, correspondence, etc. Maintain the regional transportation advisory committee to advise the ECRDC on transportation issues.
2. Conduct regional level transportation planning activities, including district and statewide planning, in association with Mn/DOT and others. Continue to participate in activities supporting development of passenger rail (Northern Lights Express) in Region 7E.
3. Resources permitting, provide support and planning assistance to the Scenic Byways, bicycle and pedestrian, and Safe Routes to School programs in Region 7E to enable them to qualify for federal Transportation (TA) program funding.
4. Implement work plan for transportation program supported by MN/DOT contract/partnership agreement. Participate in pertinent statewide transportation meetings and trainings.
5. Participate in the implementation of the Federal Transportation Bill (FAST) for the region including active participation in the Area Transportation Partnership (ATP) processes. Tasks include proposing and monitoring of projects from Region 7E in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). As needed, evaluate federal candidate projects in at least four of the five counties in Region 7E. Advocate for the “best interests” of the region for federal funding for projects.
6. Work with Mn/DOT to implement the Transportation Alternatives program (TA). Participate in D2, D3 TA and Metro District to review and evaluate applications for federal funding.
7. Provide transportation information and technical assistance as necessary to local units of government and/or others.
8. Participate in local transportation task forces (such as TH 8 task force, TH 65 task force, and others) and studies affecting the region (i.e. TH 95).
9. Provide support and technical assistance to public transit programs (i.e. Arrowhead Public Transit, Heartland Express, Timber Trails) in the region and provide limited technical assistance to Section 5310 programs/applicants.

10. Identify communities eligible for MnDOT's Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) planning funding. Assist communities with SRTS planning projects where needed.
11. Provide assistance to schools and communities who have completed Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning to implement strategies/projects to increase walking and bicycling to school.
12. Participate, as needed, in the regional review of applications for Section 5310 grant vehicles.
13. Continue, where eligible Toward Zero Deaths/Safe Roads highway safety programs in Region 7E. Participate in regional and statewide meetings/conferences related to TZD efforts.
14. Continue work with Minnesota Safe Ride to advocate for alternative transportation in Isanti County and other areas with a goal of further reducing the number of impaired driving arrests and blood-alcohol content (BAC) average readings.
15. Monitor federal transportation funding bills, such as FAST Act, for impact on Region 7E.
16. Cooperate with MnDOT in developing the MnDOT Statewide Freight Plan including following up on results of the Manufacturer's Perspective interviews.
17. Respond to any new or urgent transportation issue(s) affecting the region.
18. Respond to requests for participation in forums/discussions addressing transportation issues in the region.
19. As assigned, assist with other planning efforts of the Commission.

#### **Evaluation Criteria**

Fulfill the work program approved by MN Department of Transportation and reports to Transportation Advisory Committee, Commission, Mn/Dot, and DPS (Dept. of Public Safety).

#### **Impact**

Establish an effective regional transportation planning program in accordance with the partnership agreement of MN Department of Transportation. Improve funding for improvements to transportation systems within the region along with positive traffic safety impacts.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**OBJECTIVE I** – Maintain designation as a US Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA) authorized Economic Development District (EDD).

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Complete necessary reports and other program reports required by the EDA for continued designation.
2. Provide staff support to the region's CEDS committees that enable them to identify and prioritize regional needs and to provide direction on the economic development planning and assistance program of the Commission.
3. Carry out needs assessment studies, community surveys and other activities that provide information necessary to promote economic development within the region.
4. Implement the five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and create annual updates to it in accordance with Economic Development Administration (EDA) rules and procedures.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Achievement of this objective will be determined by EDA approval of the ECRDC as a federally recognized Economic Development District (EDD); completion of satisfactory reports to the EDA; and work accomplishments of the CEDS Committee.

### **IMPACT**

The impact of successfully attaining this objective is continued funding of the Commission's economic development program through EDA's Partnership Planning program; continued eligibility of units of government in Region 7E to apply for the various EDA investment programs especially the Public Works program for economic development infrastructure projects; and increased capacity of the region to manage its future economic growth.

**OBJECTIVE II** - To effectively administer the EDA approved regional Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program with emphasis on promoting business/industrial expansions and creating needed full-time jobs.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Provide staff support to the RLF loan committee enabling them to make decisions on loan applications that create jobs and promote the economy of the region.
2. Advertise and market the availability of loan funds, solicit loan applications, process loan requests that meet goals and objectives of the approved RLF plan.

3. Implement RLF policies and procedures in areas of technical assistance/review of loan applications, management of approved loans.
4. Participate in educational RLF staff training to enhance the capacity of the Commission to operate the RLF effectively.
5. Provide information and assistance to inquiring businesses, local chambers, business organizations, and special events on available technical and financial resources. Update regional Business Assistance Directory when needed.

#### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Achievement of this objective and completion of the work elements will be evaluated by determining the number of loans made and number and quality of jobs created.

#### **IMPACT**

Full implementation of the RLF program will have a significant impact on the region's economy through job creation as well as giving the Commission a significant resource with which to promote economic development.

**OBJECTIVE III** - Provide technical planning and grantsmanship services in the area of economic development to units of government and businesses in Region 7E.

#### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Make available information about available federal, state and private resources which can assist local communities (units of government, businesses and others) in their development efforts - serve as a clearinghouse for this information.
2. Respond to inquiries requesting information and make appropriate referrals to potential resources appropriate to each request.
3. Make available contracts for services through which Commission staff assist in completion of grant and/or loan requests through programs offered by the Federal Economic Development Administration, Rural Development, State Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Initiative Foundation, Blandin Foundation and others.

#### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Evaluation of this objective will be through determining the number of requests for information and assistance received and responded to during the year, numbers of contracts for services provided and numbers of grant and/or other applications submitted to state and federal agencies.

#### **IMPACT**

The impact of completion of this objective is increased development activity occurring within the region in accessing and making use of available resources.

**OBJECTIVE IV** - Provide business financing and resource assistance.

**WORK ELEMENT**

1. Provide information and make appropriate referrals to outside organizations that provide business planning and development services.
2. Work closely with existing businesses and entrepreneurs to identify business opportunities including providing technical business planning and resource allocation assistance.
3. Make referrals to the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to assist businesses looking to expand or relocate to the region.
4. Make referrals to Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) to assist entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs with business development.
5. Assist in coordinating the activities, events, and presentations of the East Central Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club.
6. Assist local units of government and existing businesses in obtaining resources available through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). Including strategic planning for prevention, preparedness, and response to the coronavirus pandemic.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Number of businesses and industries assisted with data and information. Number of businesses referred to appropriate local, state and federal assistance programs.

**IMPACT**

Attainment of the above objective and work elements increases the capacity to grow economically.

**OBJECTIVE V** - Maintain accurate/up-to-date economic development database.

**WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Promote and provide assistance to local units of governments, service organizations, businesses and others by services available through the census data and information service center.
2. Maintain linkages with data centers at the state level.
3. Provide assistance in access and interpretation of data available through the ECRDC data center and other data centers.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Numbers of requests for data received and responded.

### **IMPACT**

Making available locally extensive demographic, social and economic data and providing assistance in its interpretation and use is a service that enhances the ability of local units of government and others to compete for resources at state and federal levels.

**OBJECTIVE VI** - Work with the State Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO), GPS 45:93, the Central Minnesota Workforce Investment Board, State and Regional Foundations, and other regional entities in economic development efforts that address needs of the region.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Coordinate with the Central Minnesota Workforce Investment Board to identify, create, develop, and implement strategies to cultivate a qualified labor force.
2. Engage GPS 45:93 in encouraging technology based businesses to locate within our region and to encourage existing communities to develop opportunities to improve their technology infrastructure.
3. Participate with the Central Minnesota Housing Partnership (CMHP) and the East Central Housing Organization (ECHO) to address workforce housing needs for the region.
4. Work with organizations such as the Blandin Foundation and others to conduct information/outreach for broadband access for underserved areas of the region.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The effectiveness of this objective in addressing needs of Region 7E can be determined by assessing the impact of services on the region due to the use of the various state and regional organizations.

### **IMPACT**

The potential for significant positive or negative impact of initiatives undertaken by the legislature, state departments, and regional initiatives is great for rural areas of the state. It is important to units of government and citizens of Region 7E that they have a voice in these discussions and actions. The Commission provides a voice for the region in these activities.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**OBJECTIVE I** - Provide technical planning and grantsmanship services in the area of community development to units of government and businesses in Region 7E.

### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Make available information about available federal, state and private resources which can assist local communities (units of government, businesses and others) in their development efforts - serve as a clearinghouse for this information.
2. Respond to inquiries requesting information and make appropriate referrals to potential resources appropriate to each request.
3. Make available contracts for services through which Commission staff assist in funding applications and provide technical planning assistance for programs offered by USDA Rural Development, MN Department of Natural Resources, MN Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Initiative Foundation, Blandin Foundation and others.
4. Work with communities and stakeholders along with the Blandin Foundation and others to conduct information/outreach for broadband access for underserved areas of the region. Also assist communities to identify possible areas where broadband access can be improved upon.

### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Evaluation of this objective will be through determining the number of requests for information and assistance received and responded to during the year, numbers of contracts for services provided and numbers of grant and/or other applications submitted to state and federal agencies.

### **IMPACT**

The impact of completion of this objective is increased development activity occurring within the region in accessing and making use of available resources.

**OBJECTIVE II** - Implement the East Central Regional Transportation Coordinating Council's (ECRTCC) program.

### **Work Elements**

Based on information gleaned from public meetings, MnDOT, and the ECRTCC Advisory Board meetings, these tasks have been selected for implementation:

1. Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC) - Complete a comprehensive database of regional service providers' schedules, rates, routes making way towards the establishment of a Transportation Management Coordination Center.

2. Volunteer Driver Program (VDP) - Regional VDP that could be housed under an agency (or agencies) which will provide rides to transportation disadvantaged throughout our region.
3. Transportation Regulation Oversight - Bring awareness of and challenge the current issues pertaining to transportation in rural areas. Determine the status of the laws that affect our region's rural needs, if any are obsolete, and endorse the need for oversight. Our goal is to bring current, the regulations that are holding back important transportation solutions.
4. Centralized Transportation Training - Facilitate training efforts in these areas: shared marketing, fund development, service/business development, customer service, ridership outreach, general community outreach, and all aspects of formal and informal transit provider staff training.
5. Ongoing Transportation Exploration - Continued Advocacy and Awareness of up and coming transportation modalities.

#### **Evaluation Criteria**

Fulfill the work program established by the ECRTCC and approved by MnDOT Office of Transit for conducting the Phase 2 Implementation.

#### **Impact**

Provide transportation solutions for those residents in our five-county region who are transportation disadvantaged (veterans, disabled, seniors, low income, mentally challenged).

**OBJECT III-** Encourage local units of government to establish adequate land use controls that foster development most desired by the citizens of the area.

#### **WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Assist local units of government in development of land use plans and zoning regulations when requested and as time permits.
2. Provide access to and interpretation of state statutes pertaining to land use planning and regulation.
3. Coordinate with neighboring regional development commissions to enhance both local and regional planning products.

#### **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Number of units of government requesting and provided information on land use regulation, and assistance provided in development of land use plans and regulations.

#### **IMPACT**

Many local units of government are experiencing pressures of development and desire some control of the types of development that may occur in the future. The Commission

can assist in obtaining information and training on these issues and development of land use plans and zoning regulations that meet local needs.

**OBJECTIVE III** - Maintain accurate/up-to-date community development database.

**WORK ELEMENTS**

1. Promote and provide assistance to local units of governments, service organizations, businesses and others by services available through the census data and information service center.
2. Maintain linkages with data centers at the state level.
3. Provide assistance in access and interpretation of data available through the ECRDC data center and other data centers.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Numbers of requests for data received and responded.

**IMPACT**

Making available locally extensive demographic, social and economic data and providing assistance in its interpretation and use is a service that enhances the ability of local units of government and others to compete for resources at state and federal levels.

# PROPOSED AGENCYWIDE BUDGET FY2020-2021