



State of the Counties

I find it hard to describe the amount of change counties have experienced in the past year without it sounding like exaggeration. The 2022 election brought in over 50 new county leaders and a week rarely goes by without us hearing about upcoming retirements of longtime county friends across the state.

On top of that, the state legislature – a quarter of whom were rookies themselves – handed counties the challenge of figuring out how to replace the pension system most of them participate in.

But change is good, right? It certainly can be. I am optimistic about our future together in the counties. Despite all that will be new and unfamiliar in the future, I believe we will continue to climb our challenges like true mountaineers, tied together, pulling each other up, and always ultimately rising to the top.



Aaron Birst
Executive Director

County Employer Group

For the purpose of “worker’s comp,” all county employees are covered together – over 7,000 employees in one group, rather than 53 separate employers – saving money, time and administration. This program, called the County Employer Group (CEG) has been modeled in other states due to its success in North Dakota.

CEG saves money and lives in three important ways:

1. Safety Training

To prevent workplace injuries, CEG trained over **7,000** employees on safety topics, ranging from the general - like lifting safely - to the highly specialized - like bloodborne pathogens. County employees in 27 counties received over **10,000** hours of safety training, including nearly 4,800 computer-based safety training courses.

2. Risk Management

Fifty-six risk managers assist CEG with compliance issues such as investigations, inspections, reporting and injury prevention, among other duties, resulting in discounts of up to 17% in worker’s comp premiums.

3. Transitional Work Program

CEG handled **351** claims in 2022, **up 18%** from 2020.

We’re proud that CEG’s indemnity claim (lost time) is less than half of the average cost of other North Dakota employers, according to ND Workforce Safety & Insurance. CEG is one of our earliest and most successful programs, a fine example of how we work for the good of all counties.

Geographic Information System (GIS) Program

Since we launched the GIS Program in 2022, in response to a need in many counties:

10 counties have signed on to the program.

1 county met its goals with the program and completed its contract.

😊 In other words, the program is working as intended.

The program supports counties with a qualified GIS professional who helps empower counties to maximize use of their GIS data. As with other NDACo programs, the GIS Program is envisioned not to replace county employees or vendor relationships, but as a support for counties to help them kick start or improve how they use this exciting technology.

The kind of work being done with counties under contract includes:

- Redistricting
- Creating new voting districts
- Readdressing
- Precincts
- Answering questions and providing help with specific projects.

Goals for the future include:

- Continued training and networking
- Finalizing contract with NDIT to support State Parcel Program
- Contracting with more counties (16 by end of 2023)
- Informing counties and other agencies about the applications and importance of GIS.



Human Resources Service

NDACo also provides specific HR consulting services for ND counties and related political subdivisions. Like the GIS Program, it provides professional support to counties and is not intended to replace employees or contractors. Services include but are not limited to:

- Updating employee handbooks
- Training in recruitment and selection, FMLA*, harassment, etc.
- FLS** interpretations, writing job descriptions and consultation on specific HR issues and strategy.

A networking group has been developed for the County HR Directors and can be accessed as a resource for guidance and direction.

* Family Medical Leave Act

** Fair Labor Standards

Human Resources Collaborative

There was a major change to the HR Collaborative in 2023, as the program transitioned to the ND Insurance Reserve Fund after the retirement of consultant, Kathy Hogan. The Collaborative continues to be a vital resource to local government entities, and the trainings opportunities and resources will continue under NDIRF's guidance. The HR Collaborative for Local Government continues to be an important element in NDACo's HR effort. Over the spring and summer months of 2023 the Collaborative held a series of **6** online training opportunities, featuring such diverse topics as...

- Q & A with Labor Commissioner
- Focused Interviewing
- ADA
- Remote Work
- Supporting Workplace Well-Being
- HR Reference Guide Review and Utilizing LocalGovU for further training opportunities.

Nearly **600** participants took the online courses live, while all were recorded and are available upon request. The Collaborative continues to work with local government partners, including NDACo and ILG, in providing HR training to its members.

The online HR Reference Guide for Local Governments, updated in 2022, serves as a great tool for officials to understand many facets of human resources for government. You can find this resource, along with many others, at www.hrndgov.org.

NDACo encourages all local government officials with HR responsibilities to join the collaborative by clicking the "Join Now" tab on their website.

Institute of Local Government

The Institute of Local Government (ILG) soared through this past year hosting widespread training webinars. Over the past 12 months, ILG has reached more than **6,000** county officials with more than **70** training sessions! Webinars are the perfect professional development solution for all county officials and employees.

ILG was also deeply involved in the HR Collaborative trainings over the summer. Employees are your #1 asset, and human resources is an integral part to your county! HR topics continue to be prevalent. The HR Collaborative and ILG continue to offer training regarding trending and important HR subject matter.

ILG works with public and private partners from across the state to assure all courses are provided by highly qualified presenters. The online library of recorded webinars offers a variety of training opportunities and keeps expanding.

In the last 12 months, ILG has sent out nearly **1,000** recordings.

In 2023, ILG will honor around 80 hour-level award recipients!

In addition to webinars, ILG continues to offer training with member conventions and on site by request. ILG trainings are listed on the NDACo website at www.ndaco.org/ilg.

NRG Technology Services

NRG is a subsidiary of NDACo, developed to support the IT needs of all North Dakota counties. NRG's owners are all North Dakota counties.

NRG works directly with the state's IT department, NDIT, on issues that affect all counties, meeting with them to discuss the latest issues every six weeks. NRG was asked to present at the Cyber Security Interim committee meeting on behalf of NDACo. NRG's Account Manager Dwight Driscoll discussed the Cyber Security features provided by the state and the ability of counties to help fund those features.

Dwight has been attending the county tours with NDACo staff to spread awareness of the purpose of NRG and listen to feedback from all the counties.

NRG's President sits on the Criminal Justice Information Sharing Board and the State's Cybersecurity Collaboration Committee. As resources become available, NRG purchases government bonds to help support local governments with financing their projects.

All Human Service Zones should now be using Microsoft 365, provided through DHS and NDIT, for email. They also have access to Teams for increased collaboration. NRG will send a representative to the Human Service Zone Directors meeting to complement standardization and implementation efforts.

The tagline **Stress-Free IT** means their customers let them worry about managing their ever-changing and complex IT infrastructures.

Juvenile Justice Services

To assist counties and local communities with services for at-risk youth, the Division of Juvenile Services (a division of the ND Dept. of Corrections) contracts with NDACo to employ North Dakota's Juvenile Justice Specialist, Lisa Jahner. This position is federally mandated by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Lisa works with federal, state and local officials on practices and policies, administers federal grant funding, and coordinates the activities of a Governor's advisory group on juvenile justice.

With the recent award of several federal discretionary grants, in addition to the annual federal formula grant, NDACo is currently administering over \$3.8 million in federal juvenile justice grant funds. Almost all of this funding goes out to local government or community-based service organizations.

The annual formula grant provides funding to local government specifically to assist with placement costs for youth picked up by law enforcement as an alternative to secure detention (i.e. attendant care). A number of regional agreements have been established between local law enforcement agencies to provide for placement options for youth. In addition, with the use of formula grant funding, a Request for Proposals just went out to award up to \$500,000 in grant funding to local community-based organizations to implement services for at-risk youth. The goal of the funding allocation is to connect youth and families to individualized services in an effort to prevent child welfare and/or juvenile justice system involvement.

With the discretionary funding that was awarded, Lisa is managing a contract with a national training and technical assistance provider that is assisting North Dakota with juvenile justice system enhancements. Through this contract North Dakota has implemented major reform to its juvenile justice system during the last two legislative sessions. More recently, due to the significant over-representation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system, a statewide racial equity workgroup was established to look at ways to keep minority youth out of the system.

With the new legislation this past session, Lisa was asked to chair an Alternatives to Detention Planning Committee. Pursuant to the committee's recommendations, grant agreements are being finalized with the Grand Forks County and Ward County Juvenile Detention Centers to provide funding for their assistance to law enforcement with scoring the detention screening tool. The tool provides an objective determination about the proper placement of youth that have been picked up by law enforcement.

Next Generation 911

The Next Generation 911 Program made a significant impact on the state in 2023. The program collaborated with Dakota Carrier Networks and SRT Telecommunications in Minot to deploy end-to-end IP communications for the north central region of ND.

This new connectivity demonstrated its resilience during a July 911 outage event by remaining online while almost all other companies were having difficulty. T-Mobile customers are also benefiting from end-to-end IP communications, and other cellular providers in the state are planning to transition in the coming months.

With four significant outages in 2023, the 911 system has faced significant challenges. Two of these events occurred in the wireless carrier's networks outside of the 911 system, and two occurred inside the 911 system.

All these events were related to analog-based networking that NDACo is working to quickly replace. As a state, North Dakota is on the leading edge of a transition away from analog networks, ahead of all but a couple states in the country. This transition is extremely important and will lead to a more resilient and accessible 911 network in the future.

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor

The Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor (TSRP) is a joint effort between NDACo and the ND Department of Transportation (NDDOT).

Aaron Birst was North Dakota's first TSRP and worked this grant program from 2006 until May of 2022 when he was hired as the Executive Director of NDACo. Once Aaron left the position, NDACo contracted with Kristi Venhuizen (the Grand Forks City Prosecutor) to continue providing TSRP services. Recently, Kristi was appointed by Governor Burgum to be the next District Court Judge in the Northeast Central Judicial District. Aaron has been working with DOT and various stakeholders to chart the next course for this important program.

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Legislative Services

The 2023 Legislative Session placed counties in a strong position to serve North Dakota. Lawmakers considered nearly 1,000 bills and resolutions. NDACo tracked more than 500 bills. NDACo's advocacy efforts during the Session involved testifying at hearings, meeting with lawmakers one on one and gathering information from county officials. Legislative schedules of county-related bills are shared with county members weekly and discussed on various member association calls. Weekly updates and the schedule is published on the NDACo Legislative Blog.

A few of the greatest "wins" for counties this session are:

- A more permanent and reliable infrastructure funding formula
- Emergency snow removal cost assistance
- Primary safety belt enforcement
- Continued support and funding for human service zones
- Increased funding for public health, extension, guardianships and law enforcement
- Defeat of harmful legislation related to elections, budgets and property taxes.

ND Public Employees Retirement System (PERS)

The Legislature's overhaul of the PERS public pension system was not just the most impactful policy change of the session. It is possibly the most impactful of the past (and future) several decades. PERS has provided defined benefits (pension) to state and political subdivisions for years. Starting sometime in the next few years, new employees will enroll in a defined contribution plan, similar to a 401k. Current participants in PERS will not be affected, but future legislatures will have to fund the program until it closes out with its last retiree decades from now.

For detailed analysis of the 2023 Session, please visit our Legislative Blog at ndcounties.blog, and select the "2023 Legislative Wrap Up Report – Presentation" link.

Member Services

While you might say everything we do at NDACo is a member service, there are certain activities that are designed solely to keep us in close touch with county officials – our members – to be sure we are meeting their needs.

County Tours

Our goal is to reach every county approximately every three years, which means four or five counties per tour, spread out over the year in four tours. Select NDACo staff, along with the presidents and other officers of NDACo and NDCCA attend the tours. From October 2022 to September 2023, the tours visited 13 counties: Benson, Billings, Bottineau, Burleigh, Dunn, Eddy, Emmons, Foster, Golden Valley, Grant, McHenry, McKenzie, Morton, Pierce, Rolette, Sheridan, Sioux, Stark and Wells Counties.

Onboarding

NDACo welcomed a record number of county officials in 2023 with an introductory letter or email, along with copies of information on resources and programs NDACo offers that can help them in their new jobs. We do our best to follow up by one or more phone calls from staff and board members; no easy task after a big election!

Events

This year, we made a significant change to one of our primary events. In prior election years, we conducted a two-day training event called the **County Officials Academy**. In 2023, we shortened the event and focused solely on legislative advocacy training and action. It is now called **County Day at the Capitol**. Training on the essentials of each office is still important, so we have posted a playlist of twelve "Roles & Responsibilities of County Offices" videos on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/NDCounties.

Our Annual Conference serves as the primary training and networking event for all county officials. 2022 saw a continued recovery from having to do the conference virtually in 2020, and we are eager to see continued growth in 2023.

Social Media

We keep in touch through the major social media outlets (below) and encourage counties to connect with us so we can also follow their accounts.

- Website – www.ndaco.org
- Facebook – facebook.com/ndcounties
- Twitter – [@ndcounties](https://twitter.com/ndcounties)
- YouTube – youtube.com/ndcounties

Board of Directors

The NDACo Board of Directors is made up of one commissioner for each region and one representative from each member association.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Steve Lee
President

Region 7

McLean County Commissioner

Jayne Tenneson
1st Vice President

Nelson/Griggs County State's Attorney

Trudy Ruland
2nd Vice President

Region 2

Mountrail County Commissioner

Chad Kaiser
3rd Vice President

Stutsman County Sheriff

Carrie Krause
Past President

Wells County Recorder

COMMISSIONER REGION REPRESENTATIVES

Beau Anderson
Region 1

Williams County Commissioner

Nick Moser
Region 3

Cavalier County Commissioner

Steve Forde
Region 4

Nelson County Commissioner

Mary Scherling
Region 5

Cass County Commissioner

Becky Hagel
Region 6

Foster County Commissioner

Scott Ouradnik
Region 8

Slope County Commissioner

MEMBER ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

Shirley Murray

ND County Auditors Association
Sheridan County Auditor

Wanda Knutson

ND County Clerks of District
Court Association

Mercer County Clerk of District Court

Dana Larsen

ND Association of County
Engineers
Ward County Highway Engineer

Kim Jacobson

ND Human Service Zone
Directors Association
Agassiz Valley Human Service
Zone Director

Kelly Vincent

ND County Recorders Association
Griggs County Recorder

Lori Hanson

ND County Tax Directors
Association
Mountrail County Tax Director

Erica Johnsrud

ND Treasurers Association
McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

Robert Wilson

NACo Board Representative
Cass County Administrator

Perry Turner

NACo Board Representative
McIntosh County Commissioner

Chad Peterson

ND County Commissioners
Association President
Cass County Commissioner

Vision Zero Outreach Program

NDACo continues to work with the ND Department of Transportation in the Vision Zero Outreach Program.

The program hosts four regional Outreach Coordinators who have been hard at work developing and maintaining partnerships, providing resources, and coordinating outreach activities to support communities to work toward zero motor vehicle crash fatalities and serious injuries. In the past fiscal year, the Outreach Coordinators have conducted Impact Teen Driver presentations in 30 schools across the state, educating over 2,700 North Dakota teenagers on the dangers of distracted and reckless driving.

The Coordinators have widespread partnerships in every corner of the state and continue to push the needle on the importance of traffic safety and safe driving.

The mission of Vision Zero relies on personal responsibility to obey traffic safety laws and is implemented through various strategies, including:

1. Widespread public education/outreach
2. Infrastructure/road safety improvements
3. High visibility enforcement of existing laws
4. Technology advancements
5. Working with the legislature to ensure state laws represent best practices in traffic safety

The strategy of **Vision Zero** is simple: to eliminate motor vehicle crash fatalities and serious injuries in the state.

VISION ZERO

Zero fatalities. Zero excuses.



SUMMIT
CARBON
SOLUTIONS

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

Summit Carbon Solutions is an agricultural company, and we are proud of our Midwest roots. Our project was created out of a desire to protect the value of our farmland and support North Dakota's two most important industries – agriculture and energy.

During construction, Summit Carbon Solutions will invest an average of \$81 million in every North Dakota county where the project operates. Once in operation, the project will contribute an average of \$465,000 in new property taxes in those same counties to support local schools, infrastructure, public safety and more.

We're based here in the Midwest, we hire local workers and suppliers, and we're here to help drive the future of agriculture.

To get the facts about carbon sequestration and learn more about the Summit Carbon Solutions project visit SummitCarbonFacts.com.



Growing Communities. Creating Connections.

From Williams to Cass and everywhere in-between, our team of engineers and architects are here to serve the needs of your county.

CIVIL ENGINEERING | ARCHITECTURE



MINOT, FARGO, WILLISTON
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To learn more, scan the QR code with your smartphone camera.

SummitCarbonFacts.com

