

# Annual Report 2024



NORTH DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES



## 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

## 9-1-1 Services

**New Program: Collection and Distribution of 9-1-1 Fees Program:** NDACo initiated a Collection and Remittance of 9-1-1 Fees program in January of 2024. The goal was to create efficiencies in the surcharge collection process while helping the counties distribute those surcharges to the appropriate emergency communications programs. Under this new arrangement, telecommunications companies now deliver their line counts to NDACo, instead of to each individual county. NDACo calculates the appropriate surcharge total based on the counties' specific fee and then distributes the surcharges to the appropriate programs with the full remaining balance being returned to the counties. This streamlined the process for both the telecoms and the counties, helped to ensure an accurate surcharge remittance and distribution, and provided transparency and timely payments to the proper accounts.

The Next Generation 9-1-1 program continued work on an IP communications project in 2024. The program expects all local telecommunications carriers will be migrated to IP communications in 2024 with the national carriers completing in 2025. This transition establishes an end-to-end IP network increasing resiliency, interoperability, scalability, and stability. It will also set the foundation for future 911 needs such as pictures and videos being transmitted to 911 centers in real time during an emergency.

The GIS project that underlays the NG9-1-1 GIS program has also been completed. This project was started by the state over 20 years ago but has taken the past 10 years to clean up the state's initial deliverables, getting the data to a point where it could be reliably used for 911 service. NDACo, the ND Department of Emergency Services, and the counties were partners in accomplishing this historic milestone. It is expected that this dataset will also serve other areas of state and local government service since it provides the most up-to-date and authoritative addressing information available.

## 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. This saves money, time and administration. The County Employer Group (CEG) has been modeled in other states due to its success here.

CEG saves money and lives in three important ways:

1. **Safety Training:** To help prevent workplace injuries, the CEG trained about 7,000 employees on safety topics ranging from drug-free workplaces to slips, trips, and falls to bloodborne pathogens. 27 Counties participated in specialized computer-based training and logged over 10,000 hours through online training, including completing nearly 4,000 computer-based safety training courses.
2. **Risk Management** Through the implementation of effective claims management and risk management programs and practices counties have realized discounts of up to 30% in worker's comp premiums. Fifty-six risk managers assist the CEG with compliance issues such as investigations, inspections, injury reporting, and injury prevention, among other duties.
3. **Transitional Return-to-Work Program:** CEG handled 322 claims in 2023, 29 fewer than in 2022. Fewer claims = fewer injuries!

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. CEG is one of our earliest and most successful programs, a fine example of how we work for the good of all counties.

## Vision Zero Outreach Program

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

The program now hosts five 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.

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. Coordinators have successfully added 10 Vision Zero Schools across North Dakota. In a Vision Zero School, School staff and participating student leaders create a culture of personal responsibility in their school where motor vehicle fatalities and serious injuries are recognized as preventable and not tolerated.

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.



## Geographic Information System (GIS)

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 Health Department has signed on to the program for a singular project contract.
- ✓ 1 county met its goals with the program and completed its contract.
- ✓ 😊 In other words, the program is working as intended.

The program has also started to support ND Information Technology’s (NDIT) State Parcel Program with the goal of helping counties across the state to meet and surpass the standards requested by the state.

With this program, NDACo is supporting counties with a qualified GIS professional, Kaitlyn Bakken, who counties 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 to support counties and help them kick start or improve their use of this exciting technology.

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

- Drawing parcels
- Readdressing projects, large and small
- District and precinct maps for interoffice and public use
- Answering questions and helping with projects and software
- Working closely with the State Parcel Program to complete outreach and maintenance tasks.

Goals for the future include:

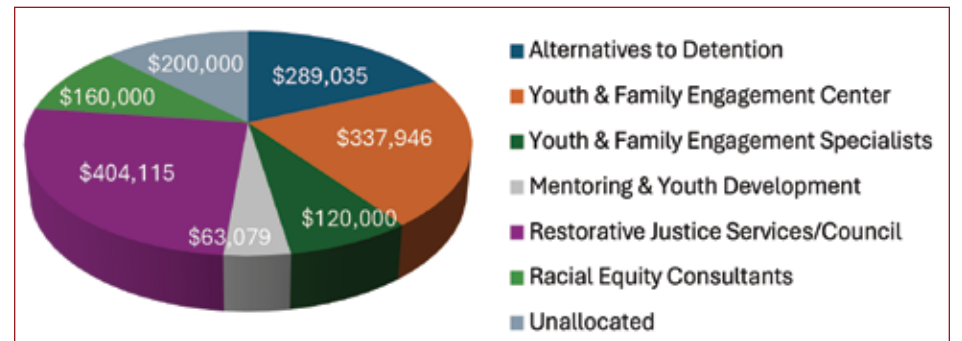
- Gain more Health District contracts to create and host a full dataset of AED’s, Healthbots and NarcanONE Boxes across the state
- Contracting with more counties (13 by end of 2024)
- Informing counties and other agencies about the applications and importance of GIS.
- Continuing education, training and networking

## Juvenile Justice Services

To assist counties and local communities with services for at-risk youth and families, 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 (JJDP Act).

In that role, Lisa is responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of the state’s strategic plan for addressing the needs of at-risk youth. To accomplish this, she works with federal, state and local officials on practices and policies, and staffing a Governor’s advisory group established pursuant to the Act to provide leadership and direction.

Over \$1.3 m in federal funding has been allocated to local programs under the current strategic plan, as detailed by the following chart. The overall goal of the funding is to connect youth and families to individualized services in an effort to prevent child welfare and/or juvenile justice system involvement.



North Dakota’s plan for Fiscal Years 2024-26, which will direct \$1.5 m in federal funding, was recently finalized. The main priorities in the plan are increasing school interventions and community-based services, particularly family-based services. The Attendant Care Program will continue to be supported as a collaborative effort with counties and cities, with additional resources for care coordination in order to assist youth and families with connection to services and supports. The plan also includes support for behavioral interventions in schools, increasing the response to mental health issues, and reducing barriers to services for youth and families.

With the award of several federal discretionary grants in addition to the JJDP Act formula funding, NDACo is currently administering close to \$4.0 million in federal juvenile justice grant funds. Almost all of this funding goes out to local government or community-based service organizations.

## 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

- Jayne Tenneson**  
President  
Nelson/Griggs County State’s Attorney
- Trudy Ruland**  
1st Vice President  
Mountrail County Commissioner
- Chad Kaiser**  
2nd Vice President  
Stutsman County Sheriff
- Nick Moser**  
3rd Vice President  
Cavalier County Commissioner

**Steve Lee**  
Past President  
McLean County Commission

### COMMISSIONER REGION REPRESENTATIVES

- Beau Anderson**  
Region 1  
Williams County Commissioner
- Steve Forde**  
Region 4  
Nelson County Commissioner
- Tony Grindberg**  
Region 5  
Cass County Commissioner
- Becky Hagel**  
Region 6  
Foster County Commissioner
- Jamee Folk**  
Region 7  
Mercer County Commissioner

**Scott Ouradnik**  
Region 8  
Slope County Commissioner

### MEMBER ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

- Shirley Murray**  
ND County Auditors Association  
Sheridan County Auditor
- Dana Larsen**  
ND Association of County Engineers  
Ward County Highway Engineer
- Kelly Palm**  
ND County Recorders Association  
Griggs County Recorder
- Erica Johnsrud**  
ND Treasurers Association  
McKenzie County Auditor/Treasurer
- Wanda Knutson**  
ND County Clerks of District Court Association  
Mercer County Clerk of District Court

**Kim Jacobson**  
ND Human Service Zone Directors Association  
Agassiz Valley Human Service Zone Director

**Lori Hanson**  
ND County Tax Directors Association  
Mountrail County Tax Director

### EX OFFICIO MEMBERS

- Robert Wilson**  
NACo Board Representative  
Cass County Administrator
- Joan Hollekim**  
ND County Commissioners Association President  
Mountrail County Commissioner
- Perry Turner**  
NACo Board Representative  
McIntosh County Commissioner

## 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 you, our county members, to be sure we are meeting their needs.

### County Tours

The NDACo Board of Directors has a goal for the County Tours to reach every county approximately every three years, which means four tours per year, averaging five counties per tour. Select NDACo staff, along with the presidents and other officers of NDACo and NDCCA attend the tours. From September 2023 to August 2024, the tours visited 15 counties: Burleigh, Cass, Emmons, Grand Forks, Grant, Mclean, Mercer, Morton, Nelson Oliver, Renville, Sioux, Steele, Traill and Ward.

### Onboarding

NDACo welcomed a number of new officials in 2024. Being an off-election year, these were mostly due to retirements. Primarily focusing on traditionally elected officials, we send mail or email messages to new officials to introduce them to the services NDACo offers to help them do their jobs.

### Events

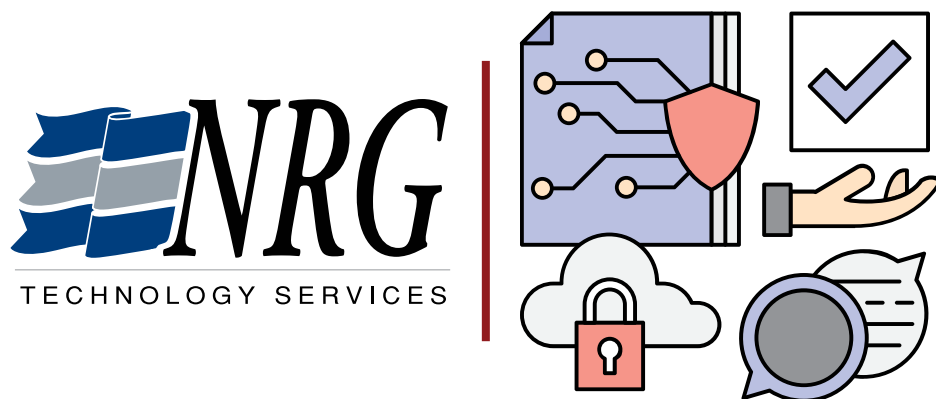
New in 2024, the County Commissioners Summit became the first commissioners-only gathering in four decades. Attended by over 100 commissioners, legislators, staff and state officials, the event received enthusiastic support and is expected to be a regular offering by the ND County Commissioners Association for years to come.

The NDACo Annual Conference serves as the primary training and networking event for all county officials. 2023 saw a continued recovery from having to do the conference virtually in 2020, and we are eager to see continued growth in 2024.

### Social Media

We keep in touch through the major social media outlets (below) and encourage county officials to connect with us. We also love to “follow back” our member counties and offices, so let us know if we aren’t following you!

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



## 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. Dwight discussed the Cyber Security features provided by the state and the ability of counties to help fund those features.

NRG’s Account Manager 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.

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

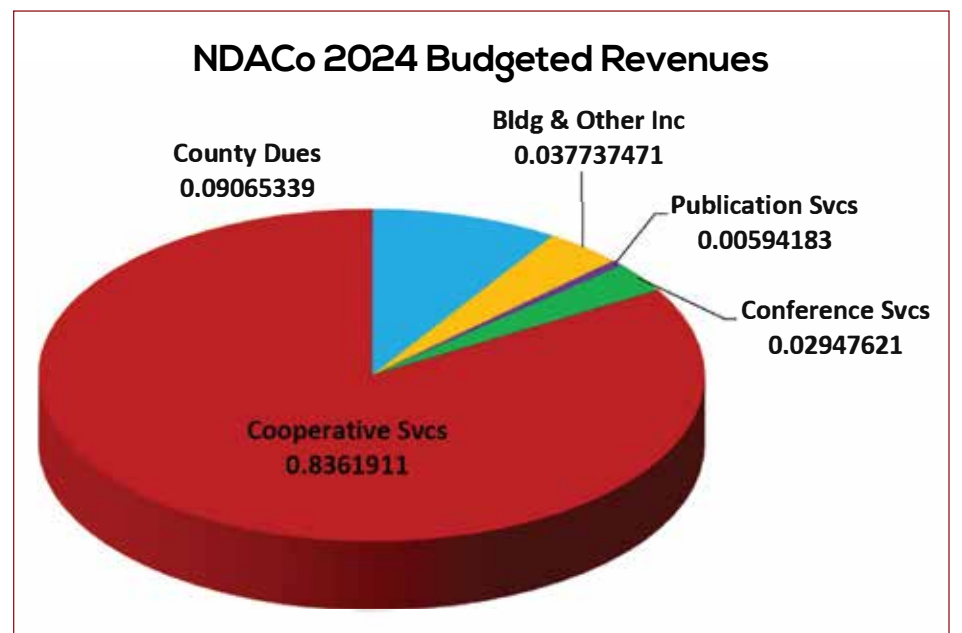
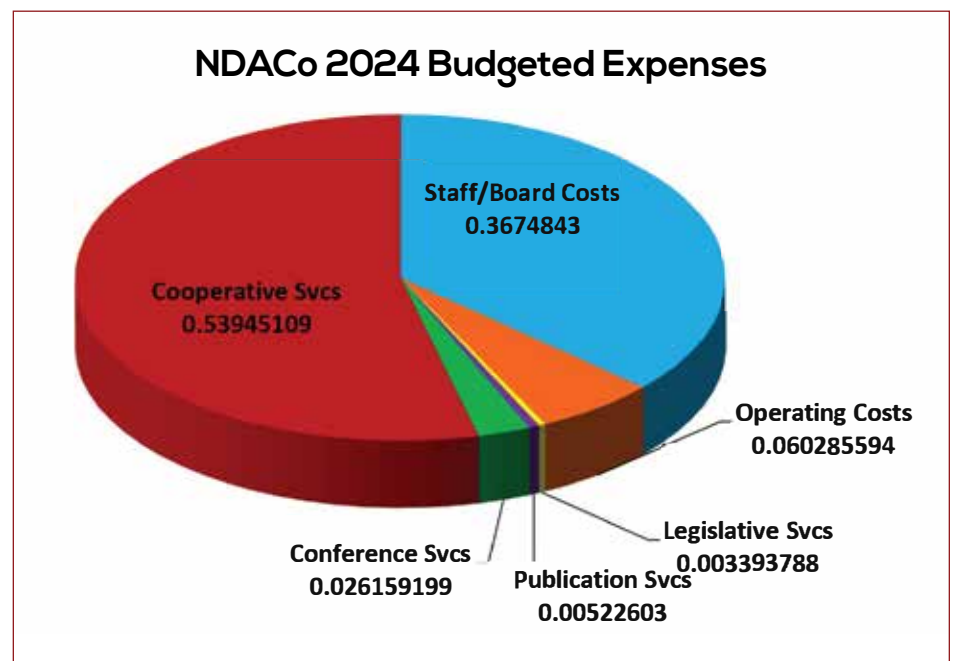


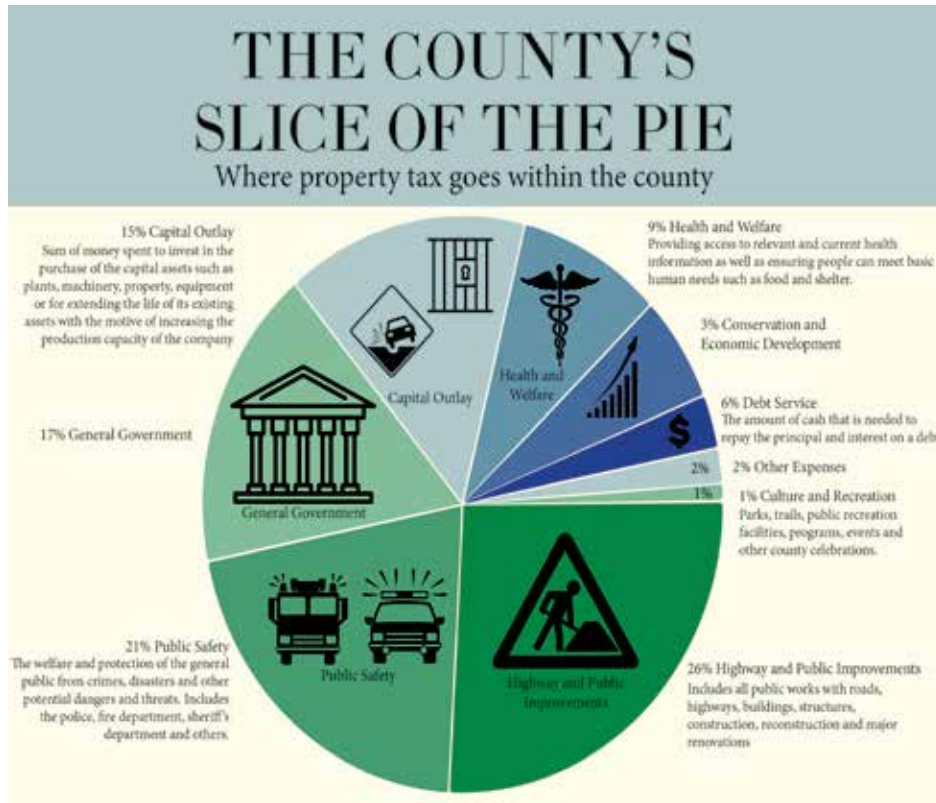
## Institute of Local Government

The Institute of Local Government (ILG), the Professional Development arm of NDACo, hosted an amazing variety of training webinars this year. Over the past 12 months, ILG has reached more than 6,000 county officials with more than 70 trainings! Webinars are offered live and on-demand, which make them the perfect professional development solution for county officials and employees.

ILG works with public and private partners from across the state to ensure 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 of these recordings. In 2024, ILG will honor around 100 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](http://www.ndaco.org/ilg).





## 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 sometimes 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](http://ndcounties.blog), and select the "2023 Legislative Wrap Up Report – Presentation" link.

## 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. When he became Executive Director of NDACo, NDACo contracted with Kristi Venhuizen (the Grand Forks City Prosecutor) to continue providing TSRP services. Kristi was appointed to be District Court Judge in the Northeast Central Judicial District, so in 2024, NDACo hired Peter Halbach. Peter's background includes working as NDDOT Chief Hearing Officer as well as prosecutor and judge.

We look forward to Peter strengthening this important program in the coming years.



# INTERSTATE ENGINEERING

## Logical Solutions With Local Connections



ENGINEERING

SURVEYING

PLANNING



Connect with us at [InterstateEng.com](http://InterstateEng.com)

## BUILT ON COMMUNITY

Embracing a collaborative team approach, Interstate Engineering focuses on building for tomorrow. From projects to career paths, Interstate Engineering knows the best approach to any accomplishment is to collaborate, celebrate success, and grow for tomorrow.

