

# ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2022

*Bridging Relationships & Resources*



**REGION FIVE**  
Development Commission

**NCEDA**  
NORTH CENTRAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION  
a Program of Region Five Development Commission

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# Introduction

The purpose of the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) is to insure the orderly and harmonious coordination of state, federal, and local comprehensive planning and development programs for the solution of economic, social, physical and governmental problems of the state and its citizens.

The North Central Economic Development Association (NCEDA) is a local non-profit corporation established with federal and local dollars through the Region Five Development Commission. NCEDA's mission is to provide assistance to cultivate new skills and resources that unite communities and contribute to a prosperous economy. By providing financial assistance in the region, NCEDA provides technical assistance, entrepreneurship opportunities for small-business owners, increases manufacturing activity, and supports innovative products and processes.



**Region Five Development Commission is a high-performing, regionally focused partner committed to enhancing the vitality and quality of life for all people in Region 5 through a resilient, collaborative, and inclusive approach to regional community development, economic development, and transportation initiatives.**

## executive director message



You know that saying...."What if I told you that the left wing and the right wing belong to the same bird?" This phrase was coined in reference to the physical seating arrangement of the politicians during the French Revolution.

For me, the "bird" is a symbol of our politics, our religious beliefs, our values that make up a community's culture. The topics over the last few years have been heavy for all of us, including the team at R5DC/NCEDA. The weight of Covid, climate change, racial/social justice and the weight of political shifts are all heavy regardless of your "wing" type.

People hold differing perspectives and solutions to issues that can polarize our populations which make it seem as though the Bird can't fly with different wings, but it CAN with the right wind conditions. The challenge for a community is to see the difference in the wing size, shape, color or origin as a benefit verses a defect and to resist the temptation of demanding conformity of one wing to be like the other out of fear of difference.

Our team engages the public through the variety of planning and implementation activities and we witness residents balancing fear and hope....yet still showing courageous vulnerability, listening with curiosity and learning to appreciate difference. So CHEERS to you who showed up and to our authentic partners who supported all of the work displayed in this annual report.

We celebrated the life and grieved the passing of Commissioner Alex Weego who brilliantly served on R5DC/NCEDA for over 7 years. We said thank you for the services of Erica Bjelland and Brendan Lee Gilligan.

We were fortunate beyond words to have Hannah Smith as R5DC's JEDI Fellow and Dennika Mays filling the position of Indigenous Local Foods Fellow and hired BJ Allen to start in August 2022, all brilliant women who we are honored to work with and learn from.

The R5DC/NCEDA team have the ability and responsibility to appreciate the differing wings as well as the head and the heart of the whole bird. While we have much work to do, we pause to express gratitude for the opportunity to serve and remain relevant to this region. Stay tuned, more to come!

Cheryal Lee Hills, Executive Director

Be well,  
Cheryal Lee Hills  
Executive Director



## *board chair message*

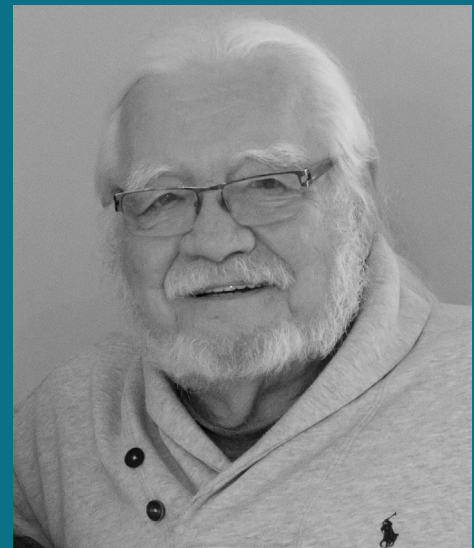
This year has gone by very fast! As chairman, working with the team at R5DC and alongside commission members has been a pleasure. The success of Region Five Development Commission is accomplished by the R5DC team, along with the great partnerships we have in the region.

I am constantly impressed by the quality expertise of the R5DC staff. The Commission leadership continues to inspire and lead by sharing best practices of rural needs and successes on a national scale. The funding through grants and contracts has set up R5DC to have a significant impact in the region but we welcome advice for continuous improvement as we seek to serve.

John Benson  
Chairperson

Alex Weego was a deeply respected gentleman and dedicated advocate for his community. He served as the Executive Director of Todd County Development Corporation for 13 years (1997- 2009). His accomplishments included development of ten Todd County industry cluster studies, including the Silicon Meadows Technology Initiative, which was a project of the Todd County Blandin Community Investment Program. He graciously worked for the betterment of Hewitt as a city council member for twelve years (2010-2022). Alex faithfully served on the Region Five Development Commission for over seven years (2015-2022), serving as the Treasurer, Vice-Chair, Chairperson, and as liaison to the North Central Economic Development Association. As a veteran, Alex was extremely supportive of the military connected programs in our region and was a strong advocate for rural broadband initiatives. Alex's kind-hearted and caring presence will be deeply missed.

## *tribute to Alex Weego*



# Our Commissioners

## *Cass County*

Bob Kangas, County Commissioner  
Annie McMurrin, Municipalities  
John Benson, Town Boards

## *Crow Wing County*

Rosemary Franzen, County Commissioner  
Jon Lubke, Municipalities  
Doug Kern, Town Boards  
Tiffany Stenglein, City of Brainerd

## *Morrison County*

Greg Blaine, County Commissioner  
Rollie Johnson, Municipalities  
Chuck Parins, Town Boards

## *Todd County*

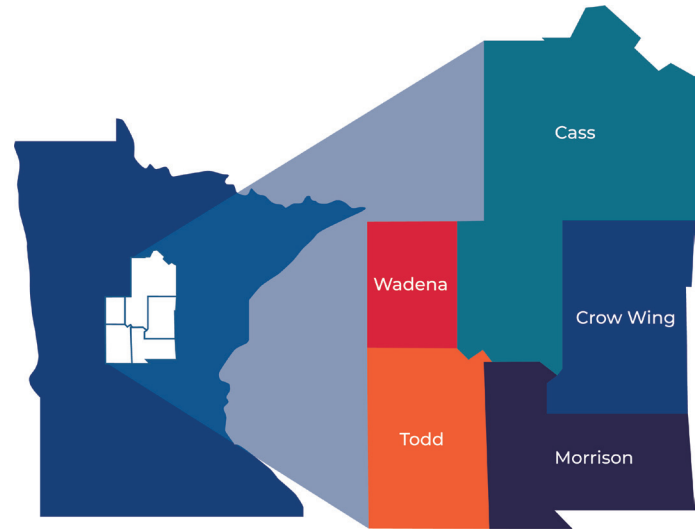
Barb Becker, County Commissioner  
Alex Weego, Municipalities  
Julie Polak, Town Boards

## *Wadena County*

Sheldon Monson, County Commissioner  
David A. Anderson, Municipalities  
Erich Heppner, Town Boards

## *Special Interest*

Steve Hall, Camp Ripley  
VACANT, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe  
Tameaka Crocker, Emerging Leaders  
Andrea Haverinen, School Board Representative  
Dr. Carrie Brimhall, Higher Education  
Diane Jacobson, Soil Water Conservation District  
Amy Sjoblad, School Board Representative  
VACANT, MN Workforce Development



*We are honored to serve the counties of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena.*



Our mission is to enhance the vitality & quality of life in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties.

# Our Staff



Cheryal Lee Hills  
Executive Director



Tad Erickson  
Sr. Regional Development Planner



Dawn Espe  
Equitable Development Specialist



Staci Headley  
Sr. Regional Development Planner



Alex Lisson  
Controller



Angela Anderson  
Marketing Director



Matt Kallroos  
Regional Development Planner



Stephanie Barney  
Business Loan Developer

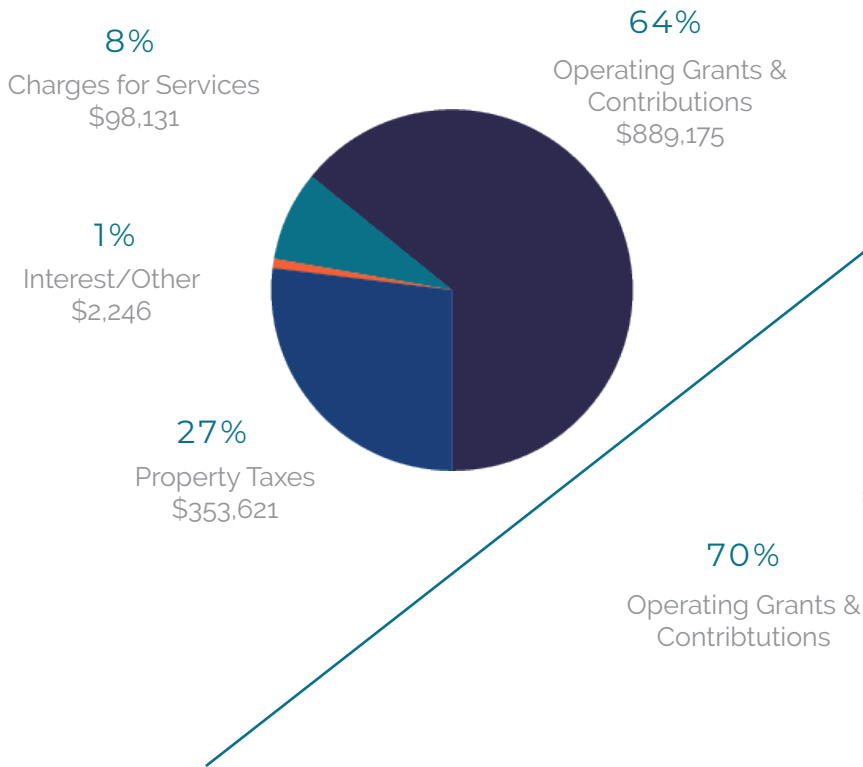


Erica Bjelland  
Regional Development Planner

# Financial Highlights

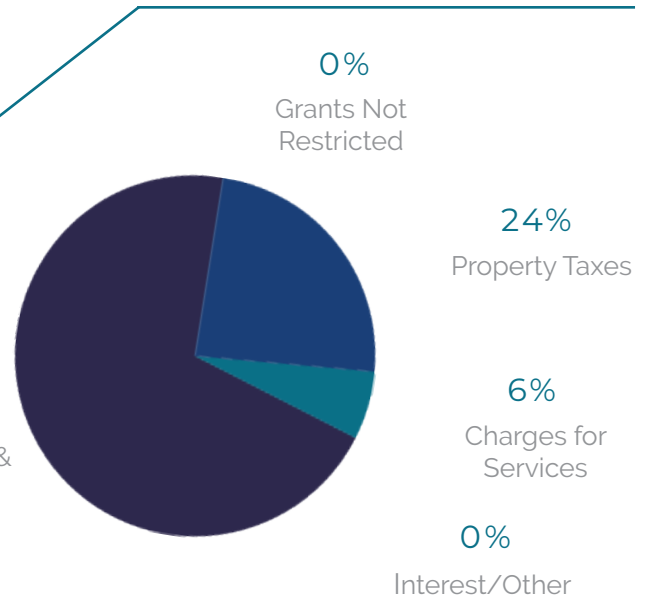
## Actual Revenue by Source for FY22

Total Expenditures \$1,212,779  
 FY 2022 Net Income \$130,394



## Expenditures

Management and Administration \$514,191  
 Community & Economic Development \$496,581  
 Transportation \$200,891  
 Debt Service \$1,116  
 Total Expenditures for 2022 \$1,212,779



## Budgeted Revenue by Source for FY22

Budgeted Expenditures \$1,412,169  
 Budgeted FY 2022 Net Income \$99,146

Region Five Development Commission's financial statements for fiscal year 2022 were audited by Schlenner Wenner & Co. An unqualified opinion was expressed.

### FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS:

\*The assets and deferred outflows of resources of the Commission exceeded its liabilities and deferred inflows of resources at the close of the fiscal year by \$3,690,587 (net position), of which 48.7 percent is restricted in use.

\*At the close of the fiscal year, the General Fund reported an ending fund balance of \$2,511,597, an increase of \$26,005 in comparison with the prior year. Of this balance \$1,485,902 is nonspendable, \$45,817 is assigned, and \$979,878 is available for spending at the Commission's discretion (unassigned fund balance).



# Economic Development



Upsala Senior Living is a 20-bed licensed assisted living community serving area residents with a newly constructed building, opening its doors and welcoming their first residents in August 2022.

R5DC's non-profit lending arm, NCEDA, was able to help with a new business start-up loan for equipment and working capital using the Revolving Loan Fund program. This funding is available through U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Learn more at [northcentraleda.org](http://northcentraleda.org).

Cheryal Lee Hills, Executive Director of Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) and representative of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), testified before Congress on Wednesday May 11, 2022. The U.S. House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth hosted the hearing, "Bringing Prosperity to Left-Behind Communities: Using Targeted Place-based Development to Expand Economic Opportunity."

Pictured left to right: Jamie McCormick, Mirielle Burgoyne, NADO Staff; Cheryal Lee Hills, R5DC, and Levon Johnson, President and CEO, Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce.



*Regional Impact since 1986*



**\$106.7M+**

## NCEDA Loans

- (1) EDA COVID Revolving Loan Fund - \$25,000
- (2) Household Well Water System Loans - \$25,194  
(Crow Wing & Wadena)
- (4) Individual Septic Treatment Systems Loans - \$21,004  
(Cass, Crow Wing & Todd)

# Community Development



Cheryal Hills and Dawn Espe represented R5DC in the Bush Foundatio's Creative Commubhity Cohort.

## *Our Fellowships*



Hannah Smith joined the team in 2022 as the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Fellow. In her role, she supports the rural workforce sector to attract and retain untapped workers (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, youth, women, veterans, previously incarcerated etc.) through the Inclusive Workforce Employer Designation (I-WE) – in direct partnership with Community Workforce Inclusion Committee, Rural Minnesota CEP and the Regional Workforce Alliance. Hannah also supports of the Justice System Consortium (JSC). Coordination and administration of quarterly meetings. Mentor JSC projects/programs in ways that offer workforce attraction and retention, and quality of life.

Dennika Mays is serving as the Indigenous Local Foods Fellow at R5DC. Dennika is involved in the region as a community culinary artist and provides CSA cooking demonstrations, along with exploration and learning of indigenous local foods, and professional development time with coursework via the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM).



## Welcoming Communities Advocacy Groups

Welcoming Communities work is one of our flagship programs that expands cultural competency by acknowledging and bridging difference. Our regional language is changing, curiosity is peaked, and our hope is that this work influences systems that are affecting equitable economic prosperity for the long haul.

We utilize the WealthWorks framework designed for organizations like ours to see the full continuum and make connections to tools like the Intercultural Development Inventory Assessments that help us build cultural capital to benefit all people.

Visit [www.regionfive.org/welcoming-communities](http://www.regionfive.org/welcoming-communities)

## Justice System Consortium

The goal of the Justice System Consortium (JSC) is to build upon our regional assets, make appropriate investments, celebrate efforts that maintain the most effective and trusting police community relations possible. This group represents diverse perspectives, cultures and communities that include; LGBTQ+, persons living with mental health, low-income, limited English speaking community members and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) residents.



## The Sowing Room

We developed The Sowing Room website, an online source to provide equity-driven tools, events, and resources by rural, for rural.



## Advocacy Group Projects

- Little Falls Wayfinding Signage
- Long Prairie Harmony Park
- Pine River Cultural Cooking Series
- Brainerd Inclusive Workforce

## JSC Events

- Long Prairie Community Conversations
- Wellness in the Woods Smudge Walk
- Brainerd/Baxter Fishing with a Cop  
(video: <https://fb.watch/ha4luYrwT/>)



# Community Development

## *regional group facilitation*

Economic Development Organization Professionals

Economic Development District

North Central Economic Development Association -  
Full Corporation & Loan Board

Regional Yellow Ribbon Coalition

Regional Military & Veteran Exchange

Regional Transportation Coordinating Council

Transportation Advisory Council

The R5DC team spent **98 hours volunteering** in our communities to causes that are close to our hearts as individuals. Since 2019, we have been meeting as a group to take care of our section of hightway near Aldrich, MN.

## *R5DC Regional/Statewide Board Participation*

100 Rural Women

Accounting & Financial Women's Alliance

Brainerd Lakes Pride

Brainerd Planning Commission

Central Lakes College Advisory Council

Central MN Partnership

Christian Labor Union Local 8 Board

Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)

Friends in the Field

Lakes Area Human Resources Association

LEAP, Inc.

MinneAg

MN Association of Development Organizations

MN Military & Veterans Exchange Steering Committee

MN Rural Broadband Coalition

Reimagining Rural Assistance Network (RRAN)

Rivers and Lakes Suicide Prevention Coalition

Rural Urban Exchange

University of MN Regional Sustainable Development Advisory Board

USDA Equity Commission Rural Community Economic Development Subcommittee

Women's Business Alliance Advisory Council

Wondertrek Children's Museum

**98**  
Volunteer Hours



## greencorps member

Brendan Lee-Gilligan served as a Greencorps member at R5DC, working closely with Erica Bjelland in helping cities to develop energy and environment plans.



## watershed planning

Meeting facilitation, public engagement, and plan development coordinated by R5DC resulted in local, and subsequent state-level approval of multiple watershed plans. These plans will lead to millions of dollars of extraordinary investment in our region over the next 10 years that will:

- protect surface and groundwater
- enhance wetlands
- protect fish and wildlife habitat and recreation
- prioritize buffer zones

1 Army Camp  
 1 Tribal Nation  
 5 Counties  
 24 School Districts  
 65 Cities  
 151 Townships  
 163,000 People

## broadband

In September 2021, R5DC partnered with Sourcewell to convene a Broadband Event for the region. This online conference provided an update to the region on the funding and resources dedicated to expanding broadband.

## military connections

R5DC supports our active duty military personnel, veterans and their families through the Regional Yellow Ribbon Program, Regional Military & Veteran Exchange (RMVE) and the VetCSA (Community Supported Agriculture) for our veterans residing in Region 5. Visit [regionfive.org/military-connections](https://regionfive.org/military-connections) to learn more.

# Transportation Planning

## *regional transportation coordination council*

R5DC continues to serve as the coordinator of the five-county Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) for the counties of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena. The goal of this council is to fill transportation gaps, streamline access to transportation and provide individuals with more options of where and when to travel. This improves mobility for the "transportation disadvantaged"—older adults, individuals with disabilities, individuals with low income and/or military veterans.

Successes of the Region Five RTCC during Phase 4 included: holding productive and discussion driven board and subcommittee meetings, created and published a provider directory, connected with new providers within the region, completed GIS mapping of all public providers in the region with the assistance of Mn Department of Transportation, and applied and awarded AARP Community Challenge Grant To learn more about the successes of the R5RTCC please visit [regionfive.org/RTCC](http://regionfive.org/RTCC).

## *transportation advisory council*

Continuing its more than 40-year relationship, assisting the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT), the Region Five Transportation Advisory Council (TAC) is charged with addressing issues of local and regional significance; reviewing and guiding the development of various transportation plans and studies effecting the region; providing input to the Minnesota Department of Transportation in planning, policy, and project development; and recommending a prioritized lists of transportation projects seeking federal aid through the Central Minnesota Area Transportation.

## *safe routes to school*

R5DC worked alongside the Verndale school district, to craft a SRTS planning document that seeks to increase safety, health and well-being of students by improving the walking and biking opportunities and by addressing any potential risks, issues and barriers that may exist.

After assessing issues and barriers, the planning team guided by Region Five developed several goals and recommendations to be considered by the school board. Each goal will be based on the 6 "E" framework, which include Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Equity, and Evaluation.

**42+**

Years of Partnership  
with MNDot

**573**

Students Impacted



## *aarp community challenge grant*

The AARP Community Challenge provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. R5DC provided transit passes, transit training, and memberships to local health and wellness center to approximately 100 seniors/ veterans/ low-income individuals who may be facing challenges caused by COVID in the five-county region. The enrolled individuals ranged in age from 12 years old to 85 years old and each were supplied with transit passes. Due to COVID, we conducted transit training via video and were able to create "How to Ride the Bus" videos for each county in the region. The grant ran from July 2021 - December 2021.



In partnership with regional stakeholders, we created the Region 5 Regional Transportation Coordinating Council website, where you can find the transportation providers in our five-county region, including a full directory and helpful resources. Visit [r5rtcc.org](https://r5rtcc.org) to learn more.

## *brainerd lakes area towards zero deaths coalition*



# Transportation Planning

## *transportation coordination*

R5DC assists MNDOT and the region through the facilitation of multi-jurisdictional transportation discussions – no other topic in transportation is as important as Safety. While each community, and each jurisdiction has its own unique challenges, and opportunities, they all strive to provide safe transportation. Therefore, staff has been engaged in local efforts to coordinate locally to find innovative solutions to safety concerns on a regional basis.

## *local human services transit coordination plan*

The purpose of the Local Coordination Plan (LCP) is to evaluate existing transportation providers, identify the unmet needs and services, and establish transportation related goals for Region Five. This documentation fulfills planning requirements for the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) signed into law December 4, 2015.

The local human service transportation coordination planning process encourages participation from all local stakeholders and the public in the region, especially within target populations. The purpose of this process is to improve human service and public transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with low incomes through coordinated transportation.

The plan contains demographic conditions, inventory of existing transportation providers, gaps in service, and unmet needs throughout the region that have been identified through analysis, committee input, and stakeholder outreach, included a 30 day public review as well as a technical review by MNDOT and was approved in June 2022.

## *toward zero deaths*

This year, R5DC staff emphasized involvement with the Brainerd Lakes Area Towards Zero Deaths coalition which is a part of the larger State (MNDOT) program known as Towards Zero Deaths (TZD). TZD to create a culture for which traffic fatalities and serious injuries are no longer acceptable through the integrated application of education, engineering, enforcement, and emergency medical and trauma services.

In addition, staff is working with MnDOT, local law enforcement, Emergency services such as fire and EMS as well as local elected leaders to develop additional coalitions in the other counties of the region currently not served.

**\$3.39M Brought in**  
**\$505K Leveraged**  
**23 Miles Enhanced**





# Celebrating Innovation

Since 2010, Region Five Development Commission has received an Innovation Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) in 2011, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, 2021. The winning project in 2021 selected by NADO was for R5DC's work and collaboration with small, rural cities to develop Energy and Environment Action Plans that help cities implement and envision energy and environment-related projects in their communities. Learn more at [www.regionfive.org/eep](http://www.regionfive.org/eep).

## *energy & environment plans*

Number of Cities: **10**

Residents Impacted: **8,294**



BJ Allen served the region as a consultant partner to R5DC during FY2022 and will join the team as Deputy Director in August 2022. We look forward to sharing more about her impressive work next year.



Erica Bjelland accepted the NADO Award at the annual conference held in Portland, Oregon in October 2021.



# Plans & Publications

## *plans and reports*

Comprehensive Regional Economic Development Strategy (CREDS)  
Five Year CREDS Planning Report - Visit [regionfive.org/CREDS](https://regionfive.org/CREDS) to learn more.

EDA Planning Grant - Progress Reports (March & October)

Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) Phase 3

Energy & Environment Plans - Visit [regionfive.org/EEP](https://regionfive.org/EEP)  
Completed: Cass Lake, Hackensack, Hewitt, Jenkins, Staples, Swanville  
In Progress: Bertha, Motley, Menahga, Sebeka

R5DC & NCEDA 5-Year Strategic Plan 2021-2026

R5DC & NCEDA 5-Year Report 2017-2021



To view our plans and publications, visit [www.regionfive.org/resources](https://www.regionfive.org/resources)

## *outreach and publications*

Take 5 with Region 5: R5DC's quarterly newsletter provides updates on our work in the region.

Deep Dive Podcast: We share program details with partners, funders, program participants, team members and our R5DC Commissioners as guests.

NCEDA: Monthly newsletter shares success stories, economic news, grants, resources and webinars.

NCEDA INSIDER: Communicates internal news to NCEDA members, R5DC's non-profit lending arm.

## *check out our podcast*

[regionfive.org/podcast](https://regionfive.org/podcast)



*Congratulations*  
to our 2022 Award Winners:

**Schlenner Wenner & Co**  
Exceptional Service Provider

**Minnesota Farmers Union**  
Exceptional Regional Partner

**Central Todd County Care Center**  
Outstanding Business Partner

**Upsala Senior Living**  
Outstanding Business Partner

Thank you to all of our amazing partners!  
We look forward to another year of serving all people  
in the communities of our region.

**R5DC & NCEDA**