McGuire Focused on Moving Counties Forward Together

Under the leadership of National Association of Counties (NACo) President Mary Jo McGuire, a Ramsey County Commissioner and current AMC President, the NACo Fall Board of Directors Meeting and Forward Together Symposium will convene county leaders at the InterContinental Hotel in St. Paul on November 30 – December 2, 2023.

McGuire introduced her "Forward Together" presidential spotlight when she became NACo president at the association's annual conference last July in Austin, TX.

During this meeting, the NACo Board will conduct NACo business and explore innovative strategies for moving counties Forward Together – the theme of McGuire's presidential spotlight for the year, which focuses on connecting and building bridges, inspiring engagement in county government, and leading intergovernmental partnerships.

Chief among McGuire’s goals as NACo president are empowering counties to use the collective county voice as well as enriching the leadership, partnerships and practices of county officials, with the ultimate benefit of better outcomes through improved trust and engagement.

“At a time when public trust in nearly all institutions is on the decline, now is the time for county officials to rethink and renew our approach to resident engagement, intergovernmental partnerships and civic education,” said Matt Chase, NACo CEO. "President McGuire's spotlight on Forward Together is perfectly timed for today's landscape."

The Board of Directors Meeting and Forward Together Symposium will be an opportunity to highlight a number of innovative county programs. According to McGuire, county government’s unique role in the intergovernmental system inspires creative action.

“Counties get the work done,” McGuire explained. "When we face challenges, we find creative and practical approaches to serve our residents.”

With keynote speakers from Braver Angels and Convergence, the Meeting and Symposium will also focus on how county officials work together. “I love that county leaders are non-partisan,” McGuire said. “Counties are united in the work that we do.”

Key Components of Forward Together

Connect & Build Peer Bridges

Counties have a proud culture of finding common ground and common-sense solutions. Relationships matter among county officials, from the local courthouse to our statewide association partners to NACo’s national footprint. We have the unlimited potential to harness - through our networks and connections with nearly 40,000 elected officials and 3.6 million professionals - the collective ingenuity, expertise and passion to advance excellence and merit trust in county government.

Inspire Community Engagement

Together, county officials lead most effectively when we listen and engage with all of our residents, including those who are most difficult to reach. Even though counties are diverse in structure and how we deliver services to our residents, all counties share the mission of achieving healthy, safe and vibrant communities. As the local foundation of our democracy, the engagement and trust of our residents is fundamental to our long-term success. We must connect with community partners and the public, including our youth and underserved.

Lead Intergovernmental Partnerships

Counties are uniquely chartered and positioned to implement and administer vital intergovernmental systems at the statewide, regional and community levels. To be successful, we must amplify and elevate the awareness, relationships and understanding of our federal, state, local and tribal partners about the fundamentals of county government.

Learn more about the NACo Fall Board of Directors Meeting and Forward Together Symposium in St. Paul at https://www.naco.org/events/2023-fall-board-meeting.
As you know, my columns this past year in the AMC newsletter have highlighted the principles found in the book *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. The agreements are (1) Be impeccable with your word, (2) Don’t take anything personally, (3) Don’t make assumptions, and (4) Always do your best. This column will focus on the fourth and final agreement.

Always do your best. We hear this a great deal – just do your best. Whether it is from your parents, teachers, or others, this agreement is not necessarily a new idea. Yet, doing our best takes significant energy and effort. As leaders, we can model what it means to do our best every day we come to work. The results are worth the effort - better work and better relationships.

Ruiz writes that doing our best may look different at different times, even within the span of a single day. Sometimes, our best depends on how we are doing. Even when we’re feeling exhausted, there is still a “best” we can do but it may look different than when we slept well and are having a great day. This is not meant to give us an excuse. Instead, this understanding of “our best” can help us be kind to ourselves as we move through the challenges we inevitably face.

We care so much about this work; it is like fuel for doing our best. If we burn out and experience compassion fatigue, we won’t be able to do our best in the way we would like to! As leaders, we often focus solely on caring for others. The way we can do that sustainably is by taking care of ourselves in the midst of it – whether that means taking time for ourselves, carving out time to spend with our loved ones, or getting outside for a walk in one of our beautiful county parks. Please take time to take care of you!

We can hold ourselves accountable to produce good work and understand where we are coming from. Doing this can help us serve our residents to the best of our ability every day and wake up the next day optimistic and ready to try again.

At the AMC Annual Conference in December, we will come together and do our best to move the important work of this association forward. We will meet in committees and make final decisions on our platform amendments and more. This means respectful and sometimes tough conversations. We will also take time to connect and learn from each other over meals, during breakout sessions, and general conference activities. I hope to see many of you there!

As this article and my presidential year comes to a close, I want you all to know how much I appreciate you! Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to work with you to help move us forward together! It has been a great honor. I am also grateful to the AMC Executive Committee, and the AMC Board of Directors for all of your service to counties.

And I especially want to thank our amazing AMC Executive Director Julie Ring and our incredible AMC staff. We are so lucky to have this team advocating with all of us. I am so proud of this association and the work we are doing to move forward together. I wish you and your families much peace and joy this holiday season.
Visit www.mncounties.org/pbp to learn more about how the products and services offered by these companies could help you serve your citizens and employees better.

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FALL 2023
Minnesota Counties
Hello to Minnesota’s 87 Counties from the Office of the State Auditor (OSA)!

By Julie Blaha, Minnesota State Auditor

We’re excited to launch a regular column in the Minnesota Counties quarterly publication, so let’s kick off the first installment by sharing key resources available on our website. This information will be useful whether you’re a county commissioner, administrator, auditor-treasurer, or new staff.

Perhaps the most important resource we provide is the Legal Compliance Guide for counties. State law requires that county audits include legal compliance audits. The OSA provides this guide to help complete those audits correctly. This guide is updated annually, located on the website under Audit Resources, and is organized so that all county-related documents are in one place.

The County Comparison Tool allows counties to compare revenues and expenditures with other counties. It also provides per capita amounts and ranking for a variety of categories, including streets and highways, human services, and public safety. This tool can be found under the Reports + Data Analysis tab.

We provide guidance on topics relevant to county governments through Statements of Position (SOPs). SOPs cover topics including county commissioner per diem payments, credit card use, and public expenditures. Note: SOP’s are educational resources and should not be relied upon in lieu of legal advice.

Another popular resource is Avoiding Pitfalls. These short education pieces address some of the most common questions we hear at the OSA. You’re able to search the titles alphabetically to find the topic you’re looking for. Like the SOP’s, we remind readers they should not be taken as legal advice. Statements of Position and Avoiding Pitfalls are under the Training + Guidance tab on the website.

We’ll close with important reporting due dates:

- January 31: County Summary Budget Form
- County Lobbying Expenditure Form
- Forfeiture Expenditure Reporting Form
- March 1: Report of Outstanding Indebtedness
- March 31: County TIF Information Form
- July 1: Performance Measures Program (Voluntary Program)
- August 1: Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Annual Reporting Form for counties that have created TIF Districts
- November 1: County Audits and Annual Financial Reporting Form
- Quarterly: Forfeiture Incident Reporting Form

Lastly, we encourage you to reach out to our office with questions. Please email questions to GID@osa.state.mn.us and we’ll get back to you promptly.

Thank you for all you do – your work makes Minnesota successful.
AMC Holds Successful Fall Policy Conference

By Laurie Klupacs, AMC Deputy Director

AMC’s Fall Policy Conference in September had record-breaking attendance this year. The conference began with an AMC Board meeting that highlighted several of our Premier Business Partners. AMC is tremendously proud to work with our Premier Partners, who also joined AMC members for our entire conference, including our bean bag tournament and wine pull fundraisers.

In addition to developing a policy platform to guide the work of AMC’s government relations team during the legislative session, the conference’s general sessions featured a number of important current topics for counties:

**County Dispatch Workforce Shortage Solutions.** The need for more 911 dispatchers is rising across the country — and Minnesota is no different. These critical staffing shortages increase the strain on current employees by adding to their workloads and stress levels and impacting service to the community. To help recruit more 911 dispatchers — the Minnesota Department of Public Safety’s Emergency Communication Networks (ECN) division, in partnership with the Minnesota Sheriffs Association (MSA), recently launched a campaign featuring digital ads, videos, articles and public service announcements. Print advertisements, billboards and a dedicated website also encourage potential candidates to apply.

Counties and state partners from the Emergency Communication Networks, Anoka County Emergency Communications Center, and county Sheriffs from both Big Stone and Kandiyohi Counties shared how there are working together to address the shortage to ensure critical public safety telecommunications needs are met throughout Minnesota.

**Tax Forfeiture.** The Tyler vs. Hennepin Supreme Court decision has significant impacts for counties across the State of Minnesota that will necessitate a fundamental revision of Minnesota’s tax forfeiture statutes. A panel from both Hennepin and St. Louis Counties provided context on the details of the court decision, reviewed why the decision matters to counties and the uniqueness of the case on northern counties. They also provided an overview of the AMC Tax Forfeiture Work Group and outlined next steps.

**Family and Community Resource Centers (FRCs).** FRCs are growing across Minnesota due to partnerships with philanthropic support. A FRC is a community or school-based welcoming hub of support, services and opportunities for families based on the nationally recognized Family Resource Center model. This model uses a multi-generational, strengths-based and family centered approach, reflecting and responsive to community needs and interests and providing support for low or no cost for participants. FRCs are a community led model, reducing the footprint of government in serving communities while fostering collaboration between local organizations, community, and government.

The first FRC was developed by Scott County and community partners through the Together We Can initiative to end child abuse. Currently, three sites are open in Scott County. Additional sites opened in June 2023 in Polk and Pine Counties through support of dedicated ARPA funds and Sauer Family Foundation implementation grants. With support from the Sauer Family Foundation, 10 counties and their community partners are at some stage of developing or implementing a Family Resource Center.

In 2023, AMC, in collaboration with the Children’s Cabinet, Department of Human Services and community partners, was successful in passing legislation in 2023 that establishes 7.1 million in funding for Community Resource Centers (CRC) and authorizes the creation of an advisory council. Sauer Family Foundation has committed to supporting the community assessments/development and early implementation of projects across Minnesota while we continue to develop, seek, and leverage other funding opportunities.

**Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP).** AMC was pleased to welcome Michael Matthews, National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Director, who addressed conference attendees and noted that Congress is back in session, and negotiations on key MIEP bills, including the Reentry Act (H.R.2400/S.1165) and the Due Process Continuity of Care Act (H.R. 3074/S.971) continue. Matthews urged members to contact their U.S. Representatives and Senators to support the inclusion of two important bipartisan bills that would address the federal Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP) in a comprehensive behavioral health package of bills, or an end of year package. Matthews provided an overview of the two bills, the legislative outlook, and shared ways that counties can continue to engage their Representatives and Senators in advocacy.

Minnesota Counties Foundation Fundraisers. The Fall Policy Conference concluded with an enjoyable networking event at our annual bean bag tournament and wine pull, which raised over $10,000 from our generous members and Premier Partners for the Minnesota Counties Foundation (MCF). As a reminder, MCF supports the development of public policy and programs for Minnesota counties through research and special programs. MCF provides critical support to AMC’s research services and awards an annual scholarship to a high school senior for future educational opportunities. Through MCF, AMC provides essential onboarding support to newly hired county chief executive officers and human resources personnel in Pathways Programs. MCF’s past successes include initiating AMC’s first county government research program and facilitating the development and launch of a statewide program to assist counties on workforce challenges and human resources technical assistance.
Annual Meeting, Board Election Set for December 4

The MCIT Board of Directors holds its annual meeting with members December 4 at 4 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Minneapolis. The meeting takes place in conjunction with the Association of Minnesota Counties annual conference. The meeting’s agenda includes:

- Financial reports for the year ending December 31, 2022, and for 2023 through September 30
- Explanation of MCIT Bylaws changes
- Board member elections
- Announcement of 2023 MCIT award winners
- MCIT year in review and look ahead to 2024

MCIT welcomes all members to attend the annual meeting. It is an opportunity for the MCIT board and staff to join with members to celebrate the successes of the year, as well as to engage in conversation with each other. Members have time to ask MCIT board members questions at the end of the meeting.

Board Election

Three sitting board members are seeking election during the MCIT annual meeting: Jackson County Commissioner Don Wachal (seat A), Stearns County Auditor-treasurer Randy Schreifels (seat B) and Lac qui Parle County Commissioner Todd Patzer (seat C).

Wachal has served on the board since his appointment in March 2019 and has been the vice chair since January 2023. Schreifels has been on the board since his appointment in June 2013 and has served as the board’s secretary-treasurer since 2021. Patzer was first appointed to the board in February 2023 to complete an unexpired term that ends December 31, 2023.

Each seat is for a four-year term ending December 31, 2027. Designated delegates from counties vote for each seat.

Call for Candidates

Any commissioner, auditor or auditor-treasurer from an MCIT member county interested in being a candidate for the MCIT board was contacted to apply by November 1.

MCIT is governed by a board of nine individuals elected or appointed from MCIT participating counties. Eight of the board seats are elected at large with staggered four-year terms that can be filled by either a county commissioner or county auditor/auditor-treasurer. The remaining seat is filled by appointment based on a recommendation from the Minnesota Association of County Administrators.

AMC Annual Conference Features MCIT-sponsored Keynotes Offering New Approaches for Risk Management

Gordon Graham and Tony Rucci provide enlightening and practical information commissioners can use in managing risks of county governments during their Association of Minnesota Counties annual conference keynote addresses December 4 and 5 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Minneapolis.

Black Swans, Gray Rhinos and County Risk Management

Gordon Graham, co-founder of Lexipol, was such a popular speaker with 2022 AMC annual conference attendees that AMC and MCIT have invited him back. This year, he continues his conversation about recognizing and managing risks within county governments in his keynote address "Your Black Swan Is Someone Else's Gray Rhino" on Monday, December 4 at 10:30 a.m. during the opening session in Nicollet Grand Ballroom.

In county government, problems arise from all directions, sometimes leading to tragedy. The concepts of black swans and gray rhinos help leaders differentiate between these problems. Black swans are the issues that are unknown, that no one sees coming; whereas, gray rhinos are massive, obvious problems that people failed to acknowledge.

In this keynote, Graham explains these concepts in more detail and shows how they relate to the basic concepts of risk management and the role county leaders play in it. Attendees explore how events that sneak up on organizations and cause tremendous problems have often been experienced by other similarly situated organizations. Graham provides strategies for how more effectively to capture and share lessons learned from close calls and tragedies, turning black swans into gray rhinos that are not only visible but also stoppable.

Members who want to learn more from Graham can attend his breakout session "The 5 Concurrent Themes for Success" on December 4 at 1:15 p.m. The role of county leaders is getting more complex. In fact, the more complex it gets, the more one needs a systemic approach to accomplishing goals.

In this program, Graham shows how the discipline of risk management coupled with an understanding of systems and complemented with customer service, accountability and integrity can all work together to better assure that the organization's work is done right. The presentation is chock full of information couched in Graham's signature humor and insights. This is an excellent opportunity for county leaders to learn more about how they can influence and manage risks within their organizations.

Keep Your County Out of Headlines: Understand Current, Evolving Cyber-threats

Tony Rucci, independent cyber-security consultant and former counterintelligence special agent, explains the current threat landscape and how cyber-crime is trending and evolving during his keynote address "Don't Be the Breaking News" December 5 at 8 a.m. in Nicollet Grand Ballroom.

Data breaches and cyber-security intrusions occur every day. Rucci offers vital information and strategies for county leaders to help position their organizations to avoid an incident. He explains that maintaining and improving data and systems security is just as important as maintaining the integrity of roads and bridges and requires adequate funding to do so.

Rucci details how:

- A county's systems can be hacked and held for ransom.
- ChatGPT and artificial intelligence affect network security.
- Third parties, such as managed service providers, can increase an organization's vulnerabilities.
- Business emails can be used to compromise an organization's systems.

Included in the presentation is an enlightening dark web demonstration showing active dark markets that sell criminal services, including information illegally obtained from public entities through cyber-attacks.

Join MCIT for the follow-up webinar "What Leaders Need to Know to Improve Cyber-security in Their Organizations" on December 13 at 10:00 a.m. Members can learn more and register for this no-cost webinar at MCIT.org/events.
Nitrogen Reduction, Collaboration Drive Dakota County’s ACRE Plan

By Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Dakota County is taking a water quality-focused, comprehensive approach to addressing groundwater concerns linked to agricultural chemicals.

The Agricultural Chemical Reduction Effort (ACRE) Plan is a collaborative effort involving Dakota County, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), the University of Minnesota Extension — and other agencies, organizations, cooperatives, businesses and producers involved in the ag industry. The Dakota County Board adopted the plan in October 2022.

About 60% of Dakota County — roughly 227,000 acres — is farmland. The ACRE Plan aims to reduce ag-related nitrate contamination in groundwater, and address contaminants such as pesticides and chlorides “where practical to protect human health and the environment,” the plan states. Its goal: Reduce agricultural chemicals in groundwater to levels that do not threaten human health or the environment.

Nitrates exceed the 10 milligrams per liter health guidelines in about 25% of the Dakota County households that use private wells for their drinking water supply. Household treatment systems may cost as much as $4,000, the ACRE Plan notes.

Within the Vermillion River watershed, the city of Hastings has spent $5 million on a nitrate removal system. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has linked nitrates to blue baby syndrome. The sometimes-fatal condition reduces the blood’s ability to deliver oxygen. Nitrates carry other human health risks, and are toxic to fish.

Concentrations can be higher in agricultural areas, shallow aquifers and sandy soils; all three exist in Dakota County.

Despite best management practices farmers have adopted since elevated nitrate readings appeared, nitrate levels in groundwater tapped by the city of Hastings have increased over the past 20 years, MDH data show. The 2020-30 Dakota County Groundwater Plan, adopted in January 2021, identified the need to reduce agricultural chemicals. One of its priorities was to develop a plan of action. The Dakota County ACRE Plan is the result. It goes beyond previous efforts — which have included the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s nitrogen fertilizer management plan — to encompass all of Dakota County, including private and public water supplies. (Earlier efforts focused on the Hastings Drinking Water Supply Management Area [DWSMA].)

Chuck Clanton, who has a background in agricultural engineering, participated in ACRE planning as an educator, researcher and producer. Manure management associated with water quality was a focus of his research at the University of Minnesota, where he was a professor in the Department of Bioproducts and Biosystems Engineering. Now retired, he continues to operate a 150-acre crop and beef farm near Hampton, where past projects have focused on controlling erosion and nutrient loss, eliminating conventional tillage, and reducing herbicide use. Through farm tours, he continues to show students conservation tillage and other practices.

“While my academic work at the University of Minnesota has often involved the theory behind agricultural production, participating in ACRE has helped me stay current with what works in the real world. As a producer, I have been able to contribute my hands-on experiences, while learning from others,” Clanton said. Clanton said his involvement with ACRE complemented his work on the Vermillion River Watershed Planning Commission and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s local advisory team for the Hastings DWSMA.

The ACRE Plan’s strategies for dealing with agricultural chemicals include data collection, communication and education, technical assistance and financial incentives.

“We really can’t do business like we’ve done in the last four decades,” Clanton said. “This is going to be an awareness that things are going to probably have to change in the future.”

Perennial crop cover such as Kernza, being viewed here during a tour, is an example of the type of practice supported by Dakota County’s ACRE Plan. Photo Credit: Dakota County SWCD

While nitrogen application rate tables have focused on fertility and economics, Clanton said he believed the next step could be to add a table focused on environmental friendliness.

Education is a primary strategy. The plan provides resources to raise public awareness among farmers and rural residents regarding groundwater conditions, practices to improve water quality, and funding opportunities. This is a key piece for a county with more than 8,000 private wells.

The Dakota County SWCD organized the Agricultural Advisory Group meetings. With staff from the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service, the SWCD provides technical assistance to help farmers better understand options available to help keep agricultural chemicals from reaching the groundwater. The ACRE Plan proposes partnering with the University of Minnesota Extension on large-scale plant tissue nitrogen testing, and on trainings such as the Nitrogen Smart program. Through the SWCD, the ACRE Plan also proposes finding ways to implement practices on rented farmland.

To encourage participation, the plan identifies financial incentives for farmers who adopt best management practices. Cost-share programs include Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources grant programs made available through local government units to help farmers implement conservation practices such as cover crops, nutrient management and integrated pest management. Those types of practices not only reduce the use of agricultural chemicals but also improve soil health and water quality.

“I’m proud that Dakota County is promoting agriculture that feeds the future,” said Jill Trescott, who in early 2023 retired from the Dakota County Groundwater Protection Unit, where she led work related to the ACRE Plan.

“Farmers here have a history of embracing big challenges; (Dakota County) has a history of innovation regarding drinking water issues and diligence in protecting public health. I look forward to seeing the county’s continued progress,” Trescott said.

Measuring Success

The ACRE Plan states it will define success by the following quantitative measures, which, it notes, it aims to make progress toward — but not fully achieve — within 10 years:

• No more than 5% of households in every Dakota County city and township that use private wells for drinking water exceed the suggested 10 mg/L guidelines for nitrates.
• No public water supply well will exceed — or be projected to exceed — the 10 mg/L guidelines in the next 10 years.
• Median nitrate levels in shallow groundwater in every township or city or smallest practical geographic area will be lower than 10 mg/L.
• No household with a private drinking water well will have pesticide concentrations exceeding 50% of drinking water guidelines.

The contributions of chloride from crop fertilizer sources to groundwater will decrease compared with current baseline conditions.

This article was provided by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. It originally appeared in BWSR's June 2023 Snapshots newsletter.
Trusted Sources of Information in the 2024 Election Year

By Steve Simon, Minnesota Secretary of State

As the leaves fall and the end of the year is around the corner, municipalities all over the state have just finished their local elections. And yet, the next chapter in the election season is coming up faster than many Minnesotans imagine.

We all know that 2024 will bring an incredibly important Presidential election year, and the first step for our state is the Presidential Nomination Primary on March 5. This is only our second time carrying out such an election under the new law – the first was in March 2020 at the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic. With our nation-leading period for early voting by absentee ballot, eligible voters may begin voting in the Presidential primary on January 19, only a few weeks from now!

I encourage every eligible voter to make their choice in that election, which will give Minnesotans a voice in the national conversation as the parties select their eventual nominees for U.S. President.

Along with the energy and excitement of a monumental election year comes the opportunity for misunderstandings or simply incorrect information to spread. Over the past year, rapid advances in technology powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as chatbots and software that make creating or modifying video and audio easier than ever, have changed the online landscape.

These new tools could be used to mislead voters on election issues or create confusion. Recently, I had the opportunity to testify before the United States Senate's Rules Committee, at the invitation of Chair Sen. Amy Klobuchar, in a hearing about the potential effects of AI technologies on our elections. My message to those lawmakers was this: AI has the potential to be a powerful amplifier of disinformation about elections.

Without proper safeguards, AI-powered software may provide inaccurate information. For example, asking ChatGPT – or similar products – when, where, or how to vote can yield false answers since elections around the country are subject to varying local, state, and federal rules. While those kinds of errors may not be intentional, they pose a risk to voters who may get inaccurate information about critical election rules.

The more ominous threat is the potential for intentional misuse of AI. Intelligence officials are already urging election officials to expect bad actors to attempt to use AI-powered tools to degrade the perceived legitimacy of our elections. The 2024 Homeland Threat Assessment by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security included a clear warning that our foreign adversaries may use AI to sharpen their attacks on our democracy.

We know Minnesotans have a lot of trust in our election system, but ahead of 2024, our office is calling on voters to stay aware as they watch the news and view content from social media or other channels. We remain committed to being a trusted source for information about elections and voting in Minnesota, and encourage everyone to:

• Be a smart consumer of media – ask yourself where did you hear the information, or is there a second source reporting that info?
• Get information on elections and voting from the Secretary of State or another government office such as a county or city elections department.
• Report any deceptive, incorrect, or misleading information that you see, and don't repost or share it.

Minnesotans should also be aware that new laws were enacted in 2023 around misinformation and deepfakes – video or audio created with AI tools. It is now unlawful to transmit information within 60 days of an election that intends to impede or prevent another person from exercising the right to vote and is known to be materially false, and it now unlawful to disseminate video images 90 days before an election without the consent of the depicted individual and created with the intent to injure a candidate or influence the result of an election.

It’s my duty to ensure that the voters of this state know that elections are fair, accurate, honest, and secure. Part of that means being aware of these emerging technologies and how they can affect elections. Minnesota voters have shown time and again with nation-leading turnout that they trust our system. It’s more important than ever to maintain that trust by being vigilant in examining the sources of our information, and always leading with the truth.
AMC Debuts Cybersecurity Toolkit

By Nathan Zacharias, AMC Technology Policy Analyst

Counties have a new resource available to guide their technology decision-making. AMC’s County Cybersecurity 101 is a 15-page “call to action, encouraging county policymakers, administrators, and IT leadership to engage with each other on the development of county-wide cybersecurity policies, procedures, and infrastructure, to meet the rising threat of cyberattacks.”

The toolkit is the result of a yearlong effort by the AMC Cybersecurity Task Force, a group made up of county commissioners, administrators, and IT directors, chaired by Commissioner Neal Gaalswyk of Cass County.

Cyberattacks are much more than just headaches for your IT department. Cybercriminals can damage the reputation of your county by releasing sensitive data, disrupt 911 and other emergency services, and shut down your county’s networks for days or weeks at a time. They may even demand thousands—if not millions—in ransom to return stolen data.

The responsibility for securing county networks is shared across leadership and staff in every county. The county board, administration, and IT leadership must work collaboratively to design and implement county-wide policies and procedures.

Every county has a responsibility to its residents to secure their data and provide consistent, reliable, and uninterrupted public services. Most importantly, ignorance of cybersecurity risk is not legally defensible in the event of a lawsuit. The best time to deploy financial resources and implement strong cybersecurity policies was yesterday. The second-best time is now.

Find AMC’s County Cybersecurity 101 and other cyber-readiness resources by visiting www.mncounties.org > Resources & Jobs > County Library & Information Center > under General Government & Taxes.

Because of our local ties, we have a true understanding of the people, needs, and resources in the communities we serve.
Making Your Voice Heard
By Matt Hilgart, AMC Government Relations Manager

AMC membership has a direct role in determining what the AMC Government Relations team advocates for and defends each legislative session. There are many ways to be involved in legislative work through AMC, but the main opportunities are by taking part in our policy platform amendment and priorities selection processes. Both these mechanisms are open to all members and while they may sound similar, they serve distinct purposes.

AMC Policy Platform Process

The AMC platform serves as our organization's guiding principles document and reflects our members' policy stances on a variety of issues divided within each of the five AMC policy committees. You may notice some of the platform “planks” (positions) on this document are more in line with general-purpose statements while others may be specific policy positions. Regardless, the purpose of this document is to guide and be a frame of reference for policy analysts' work during session when there are hundreds of bill introductions on any given week and counties must be able to react quickly.

The AMC platform carries over each year and can be changed by an amendment process that begins in November and culminates at the Annual Conference. Platform amendment proposals from any AMC member were accepted until the November 3 deadline. After submission, the Policy Coordinating Committee reviews all amendments and determines if amendments need to be heard in multiple policy committees. During the Annual Conference, amendments are presented and voted on by relevant policy committees and then presented to AMC’s general membership for a final vote of approval. There is also an opportunity for policy committees to bring up emergency amendments under certain circumstances and voting conditions.

Priority Development Process

The AMC “priority list” document serves to call attention to a select number of critical priorities that are most important to counties for the upcoming session. The priorities selected must be of critical importance, impact county budgets, not be defensive in nature, and represent an issue that impacts a majority of all counties. AMC priorities are often one of the first documents analysts share with legislators in our outreach work and are often tied to relevant discussions happening at the capitol in that given year.

The process to determine each year’s legislative priorities starts at the AMC Fall Policy Conference, whereby policy committees vote to select their committee’s top priorities for the next year. After the conference, the Policy Coordinating Committee reviews the draft priorities and votes to finalize language in preparation for Fall District Meetings ballots. At each district meeting, members had the opportunity to vote (via ballot) on their preferred top 5 priorities. After district meetings, AMC staff tallies ballot results for review by the AMC Board at the Annual Conference, where the board decides which, and how many, priorities to select for the coming legislative year.

In closing, your participation is not only at the core of determining our work for the upcoming year but is also one of the main barometers for success in any given session. It is key that when AMC speaks, legislators know that we are representing your county/community interests!

The Government Relations team encourages you to reach out to us with any questions you may have about the process or any suggestions you may have for platform amendments or work this coming year. As we inch closer to session, the team will start to provide additional opportunities to participate in legislative Zoom calls along with continuing our regular process of legislative weekly updates.

Legislative PLATFORM Development

An ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Legislative PRIORITY Development
Counties Lead on Addressing the Mental Health Crisis Both Nationally and Locally

By Matt Freeman, AMC Human Services Policy Analyst and Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators Executive Director

Minnesotans traveling to Austin in July of 2023 for the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual conference had a pretty good idea what they would experience: Consistent heat (and it was 105 degrees each day), a sea of the color red supporting Ramsey County Commissioner (AMC President and incoming NACo President) Mary Jo McGuire, and passionate discussions about mental health challenges across the country.

Launched in February 2023, the NACo Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing was created to bring together county leaders from across the nation to take action to address the ever-growing mental health crisis from the county government perspective. NACo's commission calls out that our nation's mental health policies, programs and practices are grossly insufficient to meet the scale and urgency of the moment, resulting in mounting county caseloads, poorer resident outcomes, declining workforce productivity, and increased costs across all sectors. This has called America's county leaders to demand a rethinking – a reimagining – of how we, as the world's premier nation, advance the mental health and wellbeing of our families and neighbors, especially those without proper access to the level of care and treatment acceptable in a prosperous and innovative nation.

The national data is clear: We are in a national mental health crisis. Nearly 1 in 4 U.S. adults and 1 in 5 adolescents experienced a mental illness in 2021. One third of the U.S. population lives in a county designated as a mental health professional shortage area. 75% of the U.S. population is served by county-based behavioral health services through more than 750 county-supported or operated behavioral health authorities.

The 2023 NACo annual conference featured this topic heavily, including hosting an “Enhancing Wellbeing: Summit on Mental Health,” during which participants shared their county’s experience with their peers from across the nation. It was exciting to hear from Texas and Massachusetts about leveraging federal waivers to enhance behavioral health care continuity. Discussions about intergovernmental partnerships to support a mental health system of care featured challenges and accomplishments from Oregon and Georgia’s perspectives. New York and Florida talked about supporting a county system of care through behavioral health workforce and crisis response.

Following this conference, NACo’s Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing called on NACo and local counties to tout and champion several federal priorities that seek to amend exclusionary policies under Medicaid, build and support the mental health workforce, build and enhance in local crisis response systems, and enforce mental health parity.

NACo’s number one federal priority right now is addressing the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP). MIEP strips federal health benefits from individuals admitted to jail before they are convicted of a crime, violating their constitutional rights and presumption of innocence. This policy strains local judicial, law enforcement, public safety, and human services systems, contributing to higher recidivism rates and poorer health outcomes. NACo encourages counties to share their support of two current bipartisan bills: The Reentry Act: Facilitates Medicaid payments for services prior to an individual’s release; and The Due Process Continuity of Care Act: Allows pre-trial detainees access to Medicaid benefits if their state chooses.

County commissioners leading on mental health issues is not new nor a surprise. AMC has long prioritized our communities’ mental health needs and has asked the state to ensure we have a sufficient mental health continuum of care during the last several sessions. The 2022 session saw a $200 million omnibus mental health (link) bill signed into law as one of the few pieces of legislation that passed with bipartisan support that year; counties advocated for many of the provisions in that bill, but this moderate investment was just a drop in the bucket of what needs to be done in this area. Bills passed this spring’s 2023 legislative session included additional funding for School-linked Behavioral Health Grants, Mobile Crisis Grants, new funding for Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility Start-Up Grants, bonding dollars for Regional Behavioral Health Crisis Centers, workforce incentive grants, legislation to implement and fund 988 national suicide prevention lifelines in Minnesota, and counties added as an eligible vendor under Medical assistance to provide peer recovery services.

But even these substantial investments fall short of meeting the needs of Minnesotans struggling with mental illness. That is why the AMC Public Health and Human Services (PHHS) Policy Committee again has high acuity placements and mental health continuum of care as one of its top state legislative priorities. And why the Public Safety committee also passed a mental health priority around services and appropriate treatment settings for justice-involved juveniles with mental health needs. That committee knows that in far too many instances, county jails and other public safety services are used as the frontline treatment providers for our most vulnerable residents living with mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

AMC and MACSSA expect to advocate to permanently codify language passed in 2023 which temporarily relieved counties of a cost share for mentally ill and dangerous patients transferring from one state facility to another. Counties will also seek long term solutions regarding priority admissions to DHS facilities from jails, often called the 48-hour rule, that will create accountability for the state’s role in providing a safety net for the highest need individuals and require individuals’ mental health needs be met in an appropriate setting. Former AMC PHHS Policy Committee chair, Stearns County Commissioner Tarryl Clark, testified to these challenges last session and currently serves on the legislatively created Task Force on Priority Admissions to State-Operated Treatment Programs.

If you’re interested in sharing your local perspective or testifying during the 2024 legislative session, please reach out to AMC’s Government Relations team and help us tell the story of how this issue impacts communities.
MACO Works to Notify Property Taxpayers of Budget Decisions, Prepares for Upcoming Challenges

By Michael Stalberger, Co-Chair MACO Legislative Committee, Blue Earth County Property & Environmental Resources Director

Many County Commissioners are familiar with the Minnesota Association of County Officers. MACO represents Auditors, Auditor-Treasurers, Treasurers, Recorders, Finance Officers, Elections Administrators, Deputy Registrars, and Vital Records Officials from all 87 Minnesota counties. MACO, like AMC, understands that county government is the primary point of contact and service provider for most of Minnesota's residents.

MACO members are preparing the Notices of Proposed Taxes for taxpayers. These Truth-in-Taxation notices are mailed in November and provide a preview of next year's estimated taxes. As you know, property tax estimates are the result of complex calculations. They involve many factors: local budgeting decisions, state aid, property value, property classification, and more. The 2024 notices include a MACO-led solution to a 2023 law change. That law required collecting significant detailed budget information from taxing authorities in each county. The 2024 law now requires reporting only property tax levy information.

After much deliberation and problem solving, MACO members came up with an alternative to the then-current law that provided better information to taxpayers while also creating more efficient TnT administration. This solution was presented to Commissioner Marquart (original author of the 2023 law change) who agreed that the proposed law change would produce the results he was originally seeking. MACO believes this is a simplified, as well as likely more meaningful and transparent, set of data for taxpayers to consider.

The Department of Revenue provides data in both summary and statewide formats about proposed property tax levies. This information is typically posted by mid-November on its website: https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/aids-credits-levies-and-budgeting.

MACO members are also preparing for the 2024 legislative session and other challenges. Working with AMC and other partners, MACO is reacting to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Tyler v. Hennepin County. There are many important impacts of this decision on property tax forfeiture in Minnesota. MACO's goal is to ensure any changes to the laws keep administration simple, modern, efficient, and fair. The changes also must be able to be implemented statewide.

We look forward to working with AMC and other groups at the Legislature on these and more important items.

Meet the Candidate for AMC Second Vice President

AMC delegates will vote for second vice president on December 6, 2023, at the AMC Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency in Minneapolis.

Larry Lindor, Pope County Commissioner
320-795-2495
larry.lindor@popecountymn.gov

Brief biography:
I am a lifetime resident of Pope County and have served as commissioner since April, 2009.
I also have served as a school board member, township supervisor, and church council member. I am married and we have three adult children and one grandson.
I have been farming since graduating from the University of Minnesota-St. Paul in 1973. At AMC, I have been District 4 Chair, General Government Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, member of the Governance Committee, the Cannabis Work Group, Futures Task Force, Cybersecurity Task Force, Executive Committee, and Finance Committee.

Which subject areas/issues in county government most interest you and why?
I have been active in the public health area of county government since helping to organize the five-county public health joint board Horizon Public Health. Also land use and zoning issues.

Why are you interested in this position?
I believe it is important that the AMC executive committee has a variety of voices from different areas of the state who bring with them their different experiences in life and as public servants, and I think that I will bring that to the executive committee.

What do you think should be the most important priority for AMC and why?
I think there are several things AMC must continue to work on: dedicated transportation funding, county-based purchasing, county program aid state assessed properties, tax forfeiture, and cyber security. AMC must also continue to be the voice for all 87 counties at the state government especially for those who don't have lobbyist. The staff at AMC has been doing a great job at that.

What do you find to be the most valuable parts of your AMC membership?
The networking with all the other commissioners, learning what works in their counties and what doesn't. Also, the ability to have AMC to provide the full services of policy analysts to help with any and all legislative matters.

What do you consider the greatest challenge currently facing counties and how do you think AMC can work with counties to address the issue?
I think the biggest challenge will be always the effort in forging the partnership with state government. AMC staff has the talent and ability to continue its great job in developing a working relationship to voice counties' needs.

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What the Heck Happened to the Labor Market?

By Tim Houle, Crow Wing County Administrator


“Never quit a job until you have the next job.”

When I was a kid growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, this was a phrase that my father drilled into my head. It was also something I would frequently hear whenever people talked about job searches. I don't hear that anymore.

Moreover, as employers, I think you are already keenly aware that something has changed. Our turnover rates have increased. Demands for wage increases to keep pace with inflation have increased. Our applicant recruitment pools have shrunk. All of us are now talking about labor issues nearly every day.

I’ve heard a lot of explanations for why labor is in such short supply. Typical with most things that are larger issues than we can fathom on a national scale, I think our natural tendency is to find the cause of this from within whatever perspective we currently occupy, apply that experience, and reach a global conclusion about the problem based on the limited experiences you have personally had. I’m not being critical. I just think that’s how we’re wired. The problem is that there may be information you do not have that, if you did, would entirely change your perspective on an issue. Can you, if confronted with the new information, change your mind?

I’ve also heard that no one wants to work anymore. At the same time as I hear that argument, the federal government publishes statistics that suggest we have historically low unemployment rates right now. I hear replies that this doesn’t count the people sitting on the sidelines or underemployed. While that is true, it has also always been true in this statistic, so you have to argue that there is evidence to support that a higher percentage are doing so now. While I do think these are both contributing factors, I do not believe what the Heck is happening. The chart below illustrates what I believe is happening.

The Baby Boomers are the largest generation in American history and is followed by generations much smaller in size. To put this into proper perspective, the Gen X generation, the one who immediately followed Baby Boomers is 27.6% smaller in size than the previous generational cohort of Baby Boomers. The next generation after that, Millennials, who are also now the majority in most workplaces, is larger than Gen X, but is still 18.4% smaller in size than the Baby Boomers. What that means is that for every five Baby Boomers that retire, there are four workers to replace them. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage), “We have lots of jobs, but not enough workers to fill them. If every person in the country found a job, we would still have around 4 million open jobs.” Every person? Yes.

You can make up that gap through tools or technologies that increase what a human being can produce: I can dig a ditch with my hands, with a shovel, or with a backhoe. The tool you give me can dramatically affect what I can produce in one hour work. Technology improvements is also a constant as it is happening all the time. I would argue that if this solution, which will be part of the solution, were the whole solution, we wouldn’t have a labor shortage today.

I think the labor market simply turned faster than innovation could fill the entire gap.

We can also fill the gap by importing more workers. We are already doing that and some occupations, like medical doctors, these demograpic shifts are clearly already happening. This will continue to be part of the solution, but, here again, I would argue that if it was an effective solution we could embrace, it would’ve already happened and it hasn’t because our society is not of like mind on this question.

Baby Boomers started retiring in the late 2000s. It will not be until next year that half of all Baby Boomers will have retired. What that means is that we are not done with this labor shortage. The good news is that the labor shortage only caught up with our part of the employment market relatively recently and, I believe, it will recover to more stability sooner than the rest of the labor market as well.

I am a Baby Boomer, so it is easy to say that I’m part of the problem, but I wasn’t really involved in the decisions regarding my birth. This shouldn’t really be a blame issue. This is a demographic problem that Tom Stinson, former State Economist, and Tom Gillespie, former State Demographer, told us about at an AMC event in the early 2000s.

This labor shortage was predicted and inevitable. Corrections to labor markets are painful for employers. You can lament the necessities required by the current labor market, likely actions you are not accustomed to needing to take to retain employees. Or, you can use the opportunity to tell your employees that that is how much you value them.

Births underlying each generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Number of U.S. births by year and generation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>4.7 million (Silent total births)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>7.6 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>5.5M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>6.2M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
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Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Center for Health Statistics.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

FALL 2023 Minnesota Counties 13
Documentation for Disabled Veteran’s 15 Preference Points

Not only is a holiday named to honor veterans’ service, but veterans can claim 10 or 15 preference points when applying for employment in the public sector. Veterans or the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran can claim 10 preference points. Disabled veterans, or a spouse (or a surviving spouse) of a disabled veteran who cannot use the preference due to the disability can claim 15 preference points. Of course, documentation is needed to substantiate the claimed preference points, and it is in establishing when 15 points can be awarded for a disabled veteran that hiring authorities can become unsure of what to accept as proof. In addition to the usual Form DD-214, applicants have presented a variety of documentation, such as Civil Preference letters, disability letters stating the percentage of disability, disability letters with the dollar amount of benefit received, and sometimes just a Form DD214 stating the disability. These all seem like they establish the person is a disabled veteran, but the documentation needs to meet the statutory criteria to claim the 15 disabled Veteran’s Preference points. What should the employer require as proof to claim the 15 points?

Statutory Criteria

For an open competitive examination rating (open to the public to apply), in addition to the service member's Copy 4 of Form DD-214 (or other evidence of their eligibility to claim a veteran's preference), public employers look to the requirements in Minnesota Statutes, Section 197.455, in the first part of Subdivision 6. It lists what the applicant must show to claim the disabled veteran's 15 points.

1. The disability needs to be a “compensable” one. Disability ratings are in 10% increments of 0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, ... 100%. A 0% disability rating is still a disability rating, but it is not a compensable disability rating for Minnesota’s veteran’s preference points, so such a person would be ineligible for the 15 points for being a disabled veteran, but might still be eligible to claim 10 points for being a veteran.

2. The disability needs to be service-connected. Someone who is disabled - but not because of their service in the military - is not entitled to claim 15 points as a disabled veteran.

3. The disability needs to be adjudicated by the “United States Veteran’s Administration” (most common) or by the “retirement board of one of the several branches of the armed forces.” Look for letterhead with the U.S. Veteran’s Administration or an armed forces retirement board stating the percentage of a compensable disability. The letter should be recently dated.

4. The service-connected compensable (more than 0%) disability needs to be “current” at the time the applicant is claiming the 15 points disabled veteran's preference. That is why to look for a recently dated letter, that the applicant has and is still being compensated for the disability, and that the disability was not somehow resolved and is no longer compensable. If an applicant doesn’t have a letter, steer them to their county’s Veteran’s Service Officer (CVSO) or to your CVSO who can put them in touch with their county’s CVSO (if elsewhere). It’s a good idea for veterans to register their discharge paperwork with their county’s County Recorder.

Note for First Promotional Applications: If the applicant is already a public employee, and this is their first time ever applying for a public sector promotion, then Section 197.455, Subdivision 5 states the compensable disability rating needs to be at least 50% or more in order to receive any disability veteran's preference, and if so, then 5 (vs. 15) preference points are awarded. Veterans receive no preference points for competitive promotional exams. A “competitive promotional examination” is open only to current employees that is a higher level than the employee veteran's current job. Yes, enforcing that “first time” threshold is tough since an employer does not always know the person’s application history at previous public employers. But the 5-point opportunity is meant to be on a one-time basis, not a first promotional opportunity with every public employer they ever work for.

However, if the employer posts the position externally, the disabled veteran employee can “re-use” their 15 points for all future, open competitive postings, just like every other disabled veteran applicant can do. There is an endless supply of 15 disabled veteran points for open competitive postings.

Check our Knowledge Base under the Staffing and Recruitment, Onboarding and Offboarding headings for Veterans’ Preference resources and explanations at www.amcddahrsupport.com.
10 Real-World Examples of AI in Local Government

While you've been using artificial intelligence (AI) for years (whether you know it or not), it's been getting a lot of attention lately with the introduction of ChatGPT. If you haven't had a chance to check it out yet, ask the infamous chatbot what to plant in your fall garden or to write a haiku about government budgeting. We'll wait...

Welcome back. If you think that's neat, imagine harnessing artificial intelligence technology to streamline processes, enhance decision-making, and improve citizen services within your local government.

That's exactly what's happening right now.

Check out these 10 real-world examples of local governments using AI to streamline and automate routine processes so that bright, human-minded team members can focus on more strategic initiatives.

1. Policy Draft Generation With ChatGPT
Creating policies often demands extensive research of other municipalities before drafting a policy that works for your community.

AI, specifically ChatGPT, can quickly generate policy drafts by referencing thousands of municipal examples. The more specific you are in the prompts, the more tailored the draft will be. For example, a major city will have a very different infrastructure development policy from a rural town. Providing details and your demographics in the prompt enables ChatGPT to reference policies from local governments similar to yours.

2. Constituent Support With AI Chatbots
Conversational chatbots have evolved to provide answers in a more human-like manner. In fact, most chats you initiate on a company's website begin with a bot before transferring you to a real person if the bot can't help. In many cases, you have no idea you aren't chatting with a real person from the start!

By accessing extensive training data, modern AI-powered bots can respond to queries for anything from recycling schedules to how to pay taxes. This reduces call and email volume and can even drive expenditure with words may feel daunting.

Traditionally, department heads struggled to create budget narratives. They may succeed at running their departments with traditional programs.

10. Writing Financial Narratives With AI Budgeting Software
With the explosion of short-term rentals in many areas, governments are finding it impossible to keep up with ensuring all new rentals are reported and comply with local statutes. As a result, potential revenue from short-term rental certificates and taxes is lost and tenants may not be protected under local ordinances.

AI-powered crawlers can monitor short-term rental listings on sites like Airbnb and Vrbo to ensure compliance with local statutes. By automatically identifying new listings, local authorities can take timely actions to manage the short-term rental market and drive revenue.

6. Trash Monitoring With Drones & AI Analysis
Monitoring trash in large, hard-to-access areas (like estuaries) is traditionally done on foot or via drone. But even with drones, a human has to manually view the footage to identify trash.

Drones and AI can work in tandem to identify and track trash accumulation in large areas. AI tools can be trained to recognize trash and eliminate the manual viewing of footage. In fact, AI can accurately analyze 35,000 images in 18 hours versus the month (or more) it takes to view the same photos by hand.

This approach improves environmental monitoring and helps governments develop effective cleanup strategies. The images can even be compiled to create a trash-monitoring "playbook" to guide local community groups and municipal programs in cleanup efforts.

7. Traffic Enforcement With AI Mobile Perception Systems
Manual stop enforcements by police officers require a lot of human resources, and it's impossible to catch every traffic violation. Even cameras that catch red light violations are only effective to some degree.

Mobile perception systems utilize AI to improve traffic management and enforcement. These systems detect violations other than speeding and red lights, like bus arm violations. AI effectively captures license plate data and automatically processes violations to contribute to safer roadways.

8. Utility Revenue Recovery With AI-Targeted Digital Advertising
Mailing past due utility invoices and promoting payment assistance programs via postcards is expensive and ineffective.

By leveraging AI, local governments can target residents with unpaid bills through digital ads on Facebook, Twitter, and other websites. AI enables governments to create highly targeted ads based on geographic data and delinquent customer data. By meeting customers where they are and making it easy to get help with payments, governments can recover more revenue than with traditional programs.

In fact, when Wilmington, Delaware was faced with $24M in unpaid water bills and used this approach, they were able to recover over $1.1M in unpaid bills.

9. Short-term Rental Enforcement With AI Crawlers
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10. Writing Financial Narratives With AI Budgeting Software
Traditionally, department heads struggled to create budget narratives. They may succeed at running their departments with ease, but staring at a blank page and being asked to justify their expenditures with words may feel daunting.

With AI, generative media tools can automatically draft narratives based on a few talking points or financial data from your budget. Officials simply refine the generated content to fit their preferences, and they're freed up to focus on more strategic and productive tasks.

As AI technology continues to evolve, its applications in government are likely to expand and transform the way local administrations interact with citizens and manage resources. Interested in using AI to build your budget book? Visit cleargov.com to learn more.
Earlier this year, the AMC Board created a Governance Committee to review the AMC bylaws. The committee is recommending four substantive changes to the bylaws, as well as several technical edits.

These changes will be discussed and voted on by the AMC Board of Directors at the December 3, 2023, meeting.

Changes of substance include:

- Clarifying that all board members may only serve in one board role at a time (meaning a district director can’t be a committee chair, etc.).
- Adding the descriptions, method of appointment, and terms of the Member Services Committee chairs.
- Adding the Western Interstate Region Board members to the AMC Board.
- Describing the method of filling vacancies in the Executive Committee.

The Governance Committee members include:

- Chair Karla Bigham, Washington County Commissioner
- Brad Anderson, Goodhue County Commissioner
- Tarryl Clark, Stearns County Commissioner
- Luke Johnson, Pipestone County Commissioner
- Larry Lindor, Pope County Commissioner
- Steve Schmidt, Meeker County Commissioner

If you have any questions or would like to see a copy of the proposed changes, please feel free to contact me at ring@mncounties.org.
Building A Solid Financial Foundation Takes More Than Just One Brick

If you are a public official responsible for managing public funds, then it's a pretty sure bet you already know what it feels like to be overworked, understaffed, and generally stressed out. Being responsible for millions of dollars of taxpayer money that's entrusted to your care can be nerve-wracking. One of the best ways to help relieve some of that stress is to build a solid financial foundation with the funds in your custody—a foundation that is not only safe and secure, but one that also delivers optimal returns for your municipality.

The cornerstone of any trustworthy foundation is that it is built using a series of interconnected, solid, reliable building blocks, united together to form a long-lasting structure that is much stronger than any of its individual components. In many ways, constructing a solid financial portfolio for your public entity is a lot like building a solid brick wall. It takes knowledge and skill, and the end result is something that will hold up well over the long haul.

So what are some of the building blocks that are components of a strong financial foundation? Having good working relationships with your banks is a great start. Another important building block would be to include in your portfolio a series of safe, secure, fixed-rate investments like laddered CDs and U.S. Treasuries with staggered maturity dates and of various terms from three months to 24 months.

A third component of a strong foundation might include an LGIP (Local Government Investment Pool) account where short-term money can be put to work earning at today's higher interest rates. LGIPs can't completely take the place of CDs and Treasuries, but by using these building blocks in conjunction with each other, the reliable combination will generate maximum long-term earnings and higher revenues.

There are other important building blocks as well. Accurate future cash-flow projections might be one. Another would be regularly updated information about how much you are being charged in banking fees, so you can evaluate whether those fees, or your bank's compensating balance requirements, are fair and equitable. Yet another might be access to comprehensive liquidity-analysis summaries that provide you with an overview of all of your cash across the broad spectrum of many different banks and multiple accounts. The more of these solid building blocks you have in your foundation, the stronger the end result will be.

Three+One® is proud to be working with Julie Ring and the team at AMC to help Minnesota counties build solid financial foundations. We have also been endorsed by the National Association of Counties (NACo) because solid financial structures build effective county governments.

Can we help you build your foundation?

William Cherry served for 24 years as a county chief financial officer responsible for managing and investing public funds. He has also served as chair of several large public entity investment committees. He now serves as the Director of Public Partnerships for three+one, and can be reached by phone at 585-484-0311, ext. 709 or by email at wec@threeplusone.us
Association of Minnesota Counties

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES
August 18, 2023

CALL TO ORDER
President Mary Jo McGuire called the AMC Board of Directors’ meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, August 18, 2023. The meeting was held in conjunction with the Board Strategic Planning Retreat at the Hampton Inn, Bemidji.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – COMMISSIONER MARY JO MCGUIRE
President McGuire asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing no changes, the Board moved forward with the agenda as presented.

MOTION by Brad Anderson; seconded by Vance Stuehrenberg to approve the August 18, 2023, AMC Board of Directors’ agenda. The motion carried.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT – COMMISSIONER MARY JO MCGUIRE
The following items were shared:

An overview of Commissioner McGuire’s NACo Presidential Spotlight, which is “Forward Together.” It includes three areas: Connect and Build Bridges, Inspire Engagement, and Lead Intergovernmental Partnerships.

The AMC Executive Committee met on August 7 and made the following appointments:
- Levi Novacek, Roseau County Commissioner to represent AMC on the Governor’s Council on Freight Rail.
- Patrick Veraguth, Surveyor, Douglas and Grant Counties; and Megan Waldsmayate, Project Manager, Hennepin County were appointed to the AMC Education & Training Committee.

SECRETARY/TREASURER REPORT – COMMISSIONER LARRY LINDOR
Approval of the Minutes
MOTION by Larry Lindor; seconded by Luke Johnson to approve the June 23, 2023, AMC Board of Directors’ meeting minutes. The motion carried.

Approval of the 2023 Financial Report
MOTION by Larry Lindor; seconded by Rick Anderson to approve the 2023 May and June Financial statements as presented pending the AMC 2023 audit. The motion carried.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ITEMS – JULIE RING
AMCo Operation Green Light for Veterans – Nov 6-12 – The National Association of Counties (NACO) and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) invite the nation’s 3,069 counties, parishes, and boroughs to join Operation Green Light to show support for veterans by lighting their buildings green from November 6-12, 2023. By shining a green light, county governments and residents will let veterans know they are seen, appreciated, and supported.

Outreach resources to assist counties with contacting members of Congress, engage with local news media, and utilize social media to show the county’s efforts and encourage participation can be found on the NACo website at NACo Operation Green Light for Veterans.

Possible Grant Navigator Program discussion – AMC was approached by the McKnight Foundation about a possible partnership to assist counties in applying for federal grant funds. After a good conversation, McKnight encouraged AMC to develop a proposal for consideration in their next round of grant funding. McKnight may be able to provide funding for up to three AMC staff positions for three to five years. There was no commitment of funding at this time. The Board agreed AMC should continue to explore this possible service.

Public Relations – AMC hired GoF Public to provide media training for human services staff, talking points for statewide consistency and help write an Op Ed piece to provide context around an emerging issue from non-profit organizations concerned about safety of kids in social services. GoF will help counties share a positive message on all the good things counties are doing in social services.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR ITEMS – LAURIE KLUPACS
AMC Fall Policy Conference update – There are 253 conference registrations as of today (242 last year). Fundraisers at the Fall Policy Conference – A Golf Scramble, Wine Pull, Bean Bag Tournament will be held.

Annual Conference update – Registration will open the day after Labor Day. Rooms are reserved for AMC voting Board members at the Hyatt Regency from Sunday, December 3rd through Wednesday, December 6th. Any changes to these rooms must go through Laurie. Members were asked to not call the hotel to make changes.

BOARD MEMBER REPORTS
Affiliate Representatives/District Directors/Policy Committee Chairs/WIR & NACo Board Members/Member Services Committee Chairs - Members were given the opportunity to report on key issues that affect their districts/associations.

Business & Partner Development Committee Report – Chair Roger Imdieke reported there are currently 16 Premier Business Partners which includes two new partners: the Minnesota Association of County Health Plans and UCare. There are currently 29 Associate members. The Business & Partner Development Committee currently has 10 members, three of which are Board members. Board members or county members that would like to be on the committee can contact Chair Imdieke. Meetings are held quarterly. The next meeting is scheduled during the Fall Policy Conference where the committee will discuss raising partnership fees and adding a new Diamond Level Partnership.

Education & Training Committee Report – Chair Rick Anderson reported the Education Assessment focus groups are complete. Staff is compiling and analyzing the data from the focus groups and surveys to generate a report on general findings. There will be another round of Braver Angel’s workshops on “Navigating Difficult Conversations with Colleagues” in October.

Research – Chair Luke Johnson shared the three summer interns completed six research projects which include 911 dispatch workforce challenges, data retention schedules, county board operating procedures, the county’s role in economic development, right to shelter legislation, and senior services. AMC staff will be reviewing the deliverables and posting them on AMC website.

The AMC Board of Directors adjourned at 1:30 p.m.
ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES

September 13, 2023

CALL TO ORDER
President Mary Jo McGuire called the AMC Board of Directors’ meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, September 13, 2023. The meeting was held in conjunction with the AMC Fall Policy Conference at Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center in Alexandria.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – COMMISSIONER MARY JO MCGUIRE
President McGuire asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing no changes, the Board moved forward with the agenda as presented.

MOTION by Vance Stuehrenberg; seconded by Brad Anderson to approve the September 13, 2023, AMC Board of Directors’ agenda. The motion carried.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT – COMMISSIONER MARY JO MCGUIRE
Commissioner McGuire has been busy with state association meetings. The NACo Board is excited to come to Minnesota for their annual meeting that will be held in Ramsey County prior to the AMC Annual Conference in December.

SECRETARY/TREASURER REPORT – COMMISSIONER LARRY LINDOR
Approval of the Minutes
MOTION by Larry Lindor; seconded by Luke Johnson to approve the August 18, 2023, AMC Board of Directors’ meeting minutes. The motion carried.

Approval of the July 2023 Financial Report
MOTION by Larry Lindor; seconded by Rick Anderson to approve the 2023 July Financial statements as presented pending the AMC 2023 audit. The motion carried.

Finance Committee Meeting
The AMC Finance Committee will meet on Friday to develop a draft 2024 budget. Staff will present the draft budget to the Board in October for approval. The Finance Committee members are:
- Larry Lindor, Pope County Commissioner
- Rick Anderson, Lyon County Commissioner
- Joan Lee, Polk County Commissioner
- Bob Meyer, Blue Earth County Administrator
- Todd Patzer, Lac qui Parle County Commissioner
- Barbara Wecman Brokke, Scott County Commissioner
- Rebecca Young, Stevens County Administrator

PREMIER BUSINESS PARTNER PRESENTATIONS
AMC’s Premier Business Partners were invited to give an update about their respective organizations during the meeting and to take part in the conference. The Premier Business Partners that presented are listed below.
- Cashie Software: Samantha Frederick, Product Manager
- Blue Cross Blue Shield: Shelagh Kalland, Senior Director, Public Programs BCBSMN/Blue Plus
- DDA Human Resources: Pat Melvin, Management Consultant
- H2Overviewers: Bryan Murphy, President/Founder
- ISG: Tanya Pierce, Business Unit Leader
- National Association of Counties: Kyle Clune, National Director of Financial Partnerships
- Sourcewell: Kate Thoren, Client Solutions Advisor
- UCare: Annie Halland, County, Tribal and Public Health Manager
- MN Association of County Health Plans (MACHP): Steve Gottwald, Executive Director

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ITEMS – JUNE RING
AMC staff updates: Bob Libal is AMC’s new project manager and will be working with several AMC affiliate associations. Bob earned his MPH in Public Health Administration and Policy from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health and a BBA in Health Care Management from University of Minnesota Duluth. While in graduate school, he worked for the Rural Health Research Center, the Public Health Law Center at Mitchell Hamline, and served as a CDC Public Health Law Fellow through the Public Health Law Center prior to becoming a policy analyst for the center. Bob’s first day at AMC was September 6.

Mary Lyon, AMC’s public health AmeriCorps member has signed on to work with AMC for another year. Mary will continue to assist AMC with research related to a number of topics, including opioid program implementation and cannabis.

Other updates: The Board held their annual strategic planning session last month. The focus was on board development and leadership styles from Board members. Andy Zimney, Consultant from Employee Strategies is working on a summary of the work which will be presented at the December meeting.

A special email with information about the upcoming NACo Fall Board meeting scheduled in December in St. Paul will be sent to Board members, alternates and affiliate representatives.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR ITEMS – LAURIE KLUPACS
AMC Fall Policy Conference – 270 are registered for the conference. Michael Matthews, National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Director will provide an update on Medicaid Exclusion Policy (MEIP) on Friday morning. AMC will continue with Minnesota Counties Foundation’s Workforce Brokering efforts which includes a wine pull, golf scramble and a bean bag tournament which are held at this conference.

Annual Conference update – AMC has sold 84 of the 110 booths available. Conference registration opened the day after Labor Day. Hotel rooms are reserved for executive committee members, district directors, policy committee chairs, member services chairs and NACo representatives at the Hyatt Regency from Sunday, December 3 through Wednesday, December 6. AMC will cover room charge for Sunday night only. The remaining stay is the responsibility of the Board member. Any changes to room reservations must go through Laurie. Members were asked to not call the hotel directly to make changes. Workshops are in the process of being confirmed and AMC is currently accepting County Award applications.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ITEMS – MATT HILGART
Government Relations update – Matt provided an overview of the policy committee process. Policy committees will work on developing priorities for 2024 which will be presented at fall district meetings for discussion.

COMMITTEE REPORTS
Cybersecurity Work Group Final Report
Commissioner Neal Gaal described the fact that the Board assembled a Cybersecurity Task Force in September 2022 to assess statewide county cybersecurity at a high level due to the increased cyberattacks and corresponding instability in the cybersecurity insurance market. The Task Force acknowledged the need and opportunity for pursuing state-level policy and programs to help address this issue and recognizes that no matter how much action the state takes, county-level action is necessary for a cyber-secure Minnesota. The Task Force developed a County Cybersecurity 101 document to help bolster Minnesota counties’ cybersecurity readiness and increase the digital safety of the public and the dependability of county services in the face of cyberattacks. This document is meant to serve as a call to action, encouraging county policymakers, administrators and IT leadership to engage with each other on the development of county-wide cybersecurity policies, procedures, and infrastructure to meet the rising threat of cyberattack.

MOTION by Gene Metz; seconded by Brad Anderson to approve the County CyberSecurity 101 document, as presented, which will be used to encourage county-level cybersecurity action. The motion carried.

Governing Committee
The Governance Committee was appointed to review the association bylaws. The committee members are Chair Karla Bigham, Washington County Commissioner; Brad Anderson, Goodhue County Commissioner; Taryll Clark, Stearns County Commissioner; Luke Johnson, Pipestone County Commissioner; Larry Lindor, Pope County Commissioner; and Steve Schmidt, Meeker County Commissioner.

Bylaws Committee Report
Commissioner Bigham reported on the Governance Committee’s review of the association bylaws. The committee made numerous edits for conformity and readability throughout the document. Changes of substance include:
- Clarity that all board members may only serve in one board role at a time.
- Adding the descriptions, method of appointment, and terms of the Member Services Committee chairs.
- Adding the WIR Board members to the Board.
- Describing the method of filling vacancies in the Executive Committee.

No action was taken on the bylaws. The proposed changes will be shared at full district meetings and in the AMC Newspaper, so all members are aware of the changes before the AMC Board votes on the changes during their December meeting which is held in conjunction with the annual conference.

Proposed Bylaws Update Policy: The AMC Bylaws are the overarching rules of conduct for the Association. The purpose of this policy is to document the current process for making changes to the AMC Bylaws. The proposed Bylaws Update Policy was included in the packet and is noted below.

1. The AMC membership delegated the authority for bylaws changes to the AMC Board of Directors in 1991. The Board recognizes the value of an efficient update process and adopts the interim policy allowing for per diems for AMC Board members during meetings where the full board is participating virtually. The committee recommends making this policy permanent. The committee also recommends updating the per diem amount ($80), which was previously approved by the Board but not updated in the policy and recommends changing the policy to include.

2. The Board shall appoint a Governance Committee periodically to review the bylaws and make recommendations for changes to the AMC Board of Directors.

3. The Governance Committee shall regularly update the AMC Board of Directors of possible changes and take Board input.

4. Any proposed bylaws changes are shared with the full membership at the Fall District Meetings.

5. Notice of the proposed bylaws changes is published in the AMC Newspaper with information about the AMC Board of Directors meeting where the changes will be considered.

6. The bylaws changes are then considered and adopted by the AMC Board at the December board meeting during the annual conference.

MOTION by Karla Bigham; seconded by Victoria Reinhart to adopt the AMC Bylaws Update Policy as presented. The motion carried.

Update Reimbursement Policy
The Governance Committee was charged with considering whether to make permanent the interim policy allowing for per diems for AMC Board members during meetings where the full board is participating virtually. The committee recommends making this policy permanent. The committee also recommends updating the per diem amount ($80), which was previously approved by the Board but not updated in the policy and recommends changing the policy to require receipts for all meals. A copy of the current Reimbursement Policy with these changes included was included in the packet.

MOTION by Karla Bigham; seconded by Victoria Reinhart to adopt the AMC Bylaws Update Policy as presented. The motion carried.

Education Committee – Chair Rick Anderson
Civil Mediation Skills Training for Cities and Counties and Managing Difficult Conversations with Colleagues trainings will be offered in October. The committee is currently reviewing a draft report of the Education Assessment. The goal is to have a final draft shared with the Board and membership before the annual conference.

Research – Chair Luke Johnson
The committee will review the materials from the summer internships and will discuss methods for distributing them. The work of one of the interns will be featured during Thursday morning’s general session.

Affiliate Representatives/District Directors/Policy Committee Chairs/WIR & NACo Board Members/Member Services Committee Chairs
Members were given the opportunity to report on key issues that affect their districts/associations.

The AMC Board of Directors adjourned at 1:30 p.m.
AMC SURPLUS
PROGRAM

PUBLIC SURPLUS
Public Surplus is an online auction platform designed for government agencies. AMC is partnering with Public Surplus to help counties sell surplus property online. If you are a County that has anything to sell, please check out Public Surplus as an avenue to post your auctions. There are benefits to your county, as well as the association.

- There is no cost for your county to use Public Surplus
- Buyer pays a small fee on each item sold, known as a buyers premium

AMC has partnered with the Public Surplus group to help counties sell surplus online

CONTACT PUBLIC SURPLUS TODAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

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