



# KANDIYOHI COUNTY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## STRATEGIC PLAN



2023-2026

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2022

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# KANDIYOHI COUNTY

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Strategic Plan 2023-2026

#### Background

The Kandiyohi County Economic Development (KCED) was created under a Joint Powers Agreement in 2003 by the State of Minnesota to promote economic development throughout the county. The KCED provides education, technical and financial assistance to both existing and new businesses. We recruit businesses and new industries while supporting established ones through customized assistance. We collaborate with many local, state, and national partners to move projects forward, and advocate for communities to support sustainable economic growth. In 2021 the KCED, with partners, began the Elevate Community Business Academy to provide business education and coaching specifically tailored to underserved minority entrepreneurs. This strategic plan will guide the KCED over the next three years and outlines the major goals and supporting strategies that will be pursued for the benefit of Kandiyohi County’s businesses, communities and people.

**MISSION:** To be a catalyst for economic growth of the greater Kandiyohi County Area.

**VISION:** To provide visionary economic development leadership, creating growth, prosperity, innovation, international competitiveness, and enhanced quality of life.

#### Process

The KCED has been developing organizational priorities on an annual basis by engaging staff, board members, committee chairs, and others in fact-finding efforts to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities. The planning efforts have been undertaken on an annual basis to accommodate the uncertainties and rapid changes that occurred during and post COVID. Each year, new insights have informed and guided the work of the KCED. While the overarching priority areas have shifted only slightly, the specific strategies have been adjusted each year to accommodate the most urgent needs of businesses and communities in Kandiyohi County.

The KCED selected third-party consultant, Cheryl K. Glaeser, with Achieve Consulting, each year since 2019 to design a process and facilitate a strategic planning session with the outcome of developing a shared vision of success and key strategies. The 2023 planning process began with discussions with KCED staff, as well as interviews with representatives from Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, Ridgewater College, the City of Willmar, Kandiyohi County Commissioners, and the City of New London. Interviewees referenced housing, child care, and workforce shortages as the most critical issues facing Kandiyohi County, noting how strongly intertwined these challenges are. Interviewees also suggested several potential actions that might make the most difference for the future of area businesses, communities, and residents. These actions, combined with those of the planning session participants, helped inform the KCED’s strategic plan.

The March 2023, annual planning session revealed priority areas that were also priorities in previous planning sessions. In addition, KCED staff and board members recognize that there is work from previous years that is still in process. These discussions led to the development of this multi-year strategic plan that will guide the work of the KCED throughout 2023-2026, recognizing past goal areas as well as the changing needs of the KCED service area. The KCED will use this plan as a guide to develop specific, measurable tactics each year that align with this plan, address urgent needs, and hold the greatest potential for impact.

## KCED Strategic Planning Session Insights (March 16, 2023)

Aaron Backman, KCED Executive Director, welcomed 40 individuals representing KCED staff, Joint Powers and Joint Operations Board members, members from the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development, Broadband and Advanced Technology, Business Retention & Expansion/Recruitment, Finance and Marketing and Public Relations Committees, and representatives from numerous Kandiyohi County townships, cities, and other local organizations to the planning session held on March 16, 2023.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2022 HIGHLIGHTS/2023 INSIGHTS

Backman provided an overview of KCED accomplishments in 2022 (see Exhibit A.) A few highlights included:

- Assisting businesses with workforce challenges: Job Fairs and Workforce Solutions Summit
- Supporting three new multi-family housing projects
- Completing a comprehensive housing needs analysis of Kandiyohi County/City of Willmar
- Securing broadband, child care, and other grants totaling \$7.3 million
- Improving marketing and communications by hiring Marketing & Communications Specialist, Kelsey Olson, who led improvements to materials and a redevelopment of the KCED’s website
- Completing the Willmar Wye Project
- Graduating 19 students from Elevate Community Business Academy
- Promoting a large agricultural distribution project in the Willmar Industrial Park
- Providing direct business loans totaling \$100,000

### INSIGHTS FROM KANDIYOHI COUNTY TOWNSHIPS

Kelsey Olson, Marketing and Public Relations Specialist, provided an overview of the results of a survey completed by 44 individuals representing 25 unique cities and townships. When asked if they felt represented by the work and marketing of the KCED, 61.9% selected YES, 26.2% selected NO, and 11.9% indicated they needed more information (Image 2.1, below/right). The survey also asked respondents to rank potential focus areas for the KCED. Rankings (by weighted averages) were very close with less than two points of variation across the eight potential focus areas (Image 2.1, below, left).

### CITY/TOWNSHIP REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

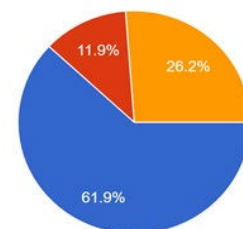
#### **Focus Areas as Ranked** (Weighted Avgs)

- |                           |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| 1. Broadband              | (6.02) |
| 2. Workforce              | (5.93) |
| 3. Housing                | (5.58) |
| 4. Marketing              | (5.47) |
| 5. Child Care             | (5.37) |
| 6. Agriculture            | (5.21) |
| 7. Industrial Development | (5.09) |
| 8. Highway 23             | (4.23) |

Do you feel represented by the work and marketing of the KCED?

Image 2.1

- Yes
- No
- Need more information



[44 Responses representing 25 Unique Cities/Townships]

## HOUSING STUDY: Analysis, Insights, and Conclusions

Jay Thompson with Viewpoint Consulting Group, shared insights from *its* analysis of housing needs for Kandiyohi County, including all 12 communities within the county. Included in the report are calculations, conclusions and ultimately recommendations on amounts and types of housing needs within the county for the next five years. This includes detailed reports for the largest community in the county, Willmar (21,015 people/2020 census) to Regal, the smallest community, with a population of 43. Key findings and the detailed reports can be found at <https://kandiyohi.com/housing-study/>.

## Facilitated Discussion to Establish Priorities

Based on the current priorities and insights shared, participants were asked to reflect on what is working well, what might need to be improved or adjusted, and what might be missing, to help determine priorities for the coming year (Table 5.1). In addition, they reviewed the priorities established for 2022-2023, as well as the KCED accomplishments over the past year.

<b>2023 Planning Session Insights on KCED Efforts</b>		<b>Table 5.1</b>
<b>Working Well: Keep Going!</b>	<b>Potential Improvements</b>	<b>Potential Additions/Changes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadband expansion efforts</li> <li>• Elevate Community Business Academy</li> <li>• KCED promotion and outreach (especially to cities, townships, and diverse communities)</li> <li>• Business retention and funding support</li> <li>• Housing and industrial development</li> <li>• Agriculture support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued emphasis on outreach to/collaboration with community EDAs and local government entities across the county</li> <li>• Increased awareness of KCED resources/support</li> <li>• Continued support for child care initiatives</li> <li>• Supporting existing businesses with workforce recruitment and succession planning</li> <li>• Supporting housing growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reframing and supporting interconnected efforts, such as housing, child care, transportation, rural EMS services under “community vitality”</li> <li>• Greater collaboration with Ridgewater College/businesses to develop quality workers</li> <li>• Development of additional industrial lots</li> <li>• Marketing the area as a premier place to live/work</li> </ul>

Participants were asked to consider which potential priority areas require the most immediate attention in 2023-2024 by voting for their top three priority areas. Participants ranked the top five (in order of priority voting) as: Housing, Broadband, Child Care, Workforce and Business Support (Retention/Expansion). These priorities have consistently been in the top five across the past four years (Table 5.2), although ranking and strategic objectives have shifted each year based on a variety of factors.

<b>TOP 5 RANKED PRIORITIES FROM PAST FOUR YEARS</b>			<b>Table 5.2</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Housing</li> <li>2. Broadband</li> <li>3. Child Care</li> <li>4. Workforce</li> <li>5. Business Support</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Housing</li> <li>2. Broadband</li> <li>3. Child Care</li> <li>4. Workforce</li> <li>5. Business Support</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broadband</li> <li>2. Workforce</li> <li>3. Business Support</li> <li>4. Child Care</li> <li>5. Housing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Workforce</li> <li>2. Business Support</li> <li>3. Child Care</li> <li>4. Broadband</li> <li>5. Housing</li> </ol>

The consistency of these priorities combined with deeper evaluation of past plans, insights, KCED accomplishments, and discussions with staff, led to the development of overarching strategic goals and objectives for the next three to five years rather than re-establishing strategies for 2023 alone. These goals and objectives combined the most successful efforts of the KCED with potential improvements and/or new focused efforts.

## 2023-2026 STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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### Housing Development

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The KCED will work in collaboration with the Housing Task Force, Kandiyohi County communities, local realtors and developers, and other entities to develop alternative, diverse, and affordable housing options countywide.

**Guiding Leaders:** KCED staff in partnership with the Housing Task Force

**Key Partners:** Vision 2040 Housing Task Force, Kandiyohi County HRA, Willmar Area Community Foundation, United Community Action Partnership, Kandiyohi County city representatives, local realtors/developers

#### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Aid cross-agency collaboration by supporting and advancing the efforts of the Willmar Housing Task Force.**
- **Serve as a catalyst for housing planning and development across Kandiyohi County by sharing the housing studies\* and support planning-related discussions in partnership with agencies/governmental units. \*See page 3**
- **Research and establish programs that support the rehabilitation of existing housing stock and use of under-utilized lots with infrastructure in place across the county.**
- **Research and reimagine innovative and sustainable housing concepts for addressing the most urgent housing needs in Kandiyohi County, based on findings from the 2023 Willmar and Kandiyohi County housing studies.**
  - o Work to develop housing options that fit for seniors now, but can pivot for next-generation use in the future.
  - o Research and share housing options that can grow with families (home design includes the full-sized end-product, but the home can be built in stages as family size and incomes grow).

*VISION OF IMPACT: Kandiyohi County is noted as a premier location for quality and affordable housing for all socio-economic status and stages of life.*

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### GOAL: Broadband Development

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The KCED will educate, lobby, and collaborate to secure future-proof broadband services through Kandiyohi County.

**Guiding Leaders:** Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee

**Key Partners:** Kandiyohi County cities and townships, local and state legislators, and broadband service providers

#### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Collaborate:** Continue to build and support coalitions of Kandiyohi County communities and townships seeking to facilitate the investment in broadband for the benefit of their residents
- **Lobby:** Strive to secure broadband resources by working with local townships, cities, county and state representatives. Support statewide lobbying efforts that enhance policies for broadband expansion.

- **Educate:** Support education and awareness efforts to build a "digitally equitable" Kandiyohi County in which "all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy" ([National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)).

*VISION OF IMPACT: Kandiyohi County creates equal opportunities for businesses and individuals to participate in the modern, global economy and have equal access to educational, healthcare, and socio-spiritual opportunities.*

## GOAL: Child Care

The KCED will support private and public partners in addressing the need for available, affordable, and quality child care throughout Kandiyohi County.

**Committee:** KCED staff works with the Kandiyohi County Rural Child Care and Innovation Coalition (RCCIP) to support and guide these objectives

**Key Partners:** RCCIP, United Community Action Partnership, Willmar Area Community Foundation, area businesses, local and state legislators

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Work with RCCIP to establish key strategies and support community and partners efforts
- Increase the awareness of business planning and funding opportunities for new and existing child care providers
- Support Ridgewater College in developing educational systems to support diverse persons working or desiring to work in the child care field

*VISION OF IMPACT: The KCED will help improve the state of child care, empower local child care providers, and provide the local workforce with affordable, quality child care.*

## GOAL: Workforce Development

The KCED will catalyze and support innovative strategies to build a skilled workforce that meets the needs of our local economy and helps individuals reach their full potential through career awareness, training and development.

**Guiding Leaders:** Workforce Development Subcommittee

**Key Partners:** Ridgewater College, Central MN Jobs and Training, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission, and area employers

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Education and Training:** Support and promote opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential through career awareness, training and development.
  - Promote Ridgewater College as an employer, as well as educational partner to area businesses, students and workers.



- Expand existing and establish new opportunities to educate/train Kandiyohi County's diverse workforce.
- Support Kandiyohi County school programs that expose students to local careers.
- **Business and Community Engagement:** Work with area businesses and community partners to identify and address workforce needs and promote area employment opportunities.
  - Host a bi-annual Workforce Summit to explore best practices, identify workforce challenges, and work together on solutions.
  - Help connect business and education partners seeking to expose students to and prepare them for local career opportunities.
- **Talent Attraction:** Guide collaborative efforts to promote the quality of life and build positive campaigns that attract workers to Kandiyohi County.
  - Expand awareness of local careers through job fairs, social media, and other marketing strategies that showcase the advantages of working/living in Kandiyohi County.

*VISION OF IMPACT: The KCED will support business retention and growth by addressing the need for skilled workers through innovative recruitment and training strategies that establish Kandiyohi County as a workforce development leader.*

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## GOAL: Business and Industry Development

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The KCED will support existing businesses and industries and foster the growth of new opportunities through awareness, technical support and access to funding.

**Guiding Leaders:** Business and Industrial Development Committee

**Key Partners:** Local lenders, lending partners, entrepreneurs, businesses, agriculture organizations and producers

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Business Outreach:** Intentional outreach to businesses across Kandiyohi County to identify countywide needs/opportunities, provide awareness of KCED and partner services and support, and share their successes.
- **Finance and Technical Assistance:** Leverage, market, and align the financial resources, loan programs, technical assistance, and community development programs needed to support economic and business growth.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Provide focused support for emerging entrepreneurs and those seeking to operate an existing business through technical assistance and programs, such as [Elevate Community Business Academy](#).
- **Agriculture:** Sustain, identify, and develop agriculture, agribusiness, and renewable energy opportunities through collaborative support of education, awareness, and advocacy efforts that leverage Kandiyohi County's agriculture assets and recruit value-added markets to the county.

*VISION OF IMPACT: Kandiyohi County businesses and industries prosper, innovate and are competitive in today's global economy. Our communities recognize and value the important role of its business and industry sectors and understand how the KCED supports their advancement.*

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## GOAL: Marketing, Communications and Public Relations

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The KCED will strengthen its brand and build connections that advance its support and services through intentional marketing, outreach, and engagement in communities across Kandiyohi County.

**Guiding Leaders:** Marketing and Public Relations Committee

**Key Partners:** City Councils, local economic development groups; Chambers of Commerce, local businesses/community members

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Enhance Brand/Visibility:** Position the KCED with updated and consistent branding that enhances its ability to proactively increase awareness of the KCED. Ensure branding aligns with Kandiyohi County and/or other regional branding.
- **Promotion of Kandiyohi County:** Identify and develop a cohesive county message and methods to promote the county as a place to work, start a business, or expand a business.
- **Intentional Messaging and Outreach:** Identify key audiences and develop outreach opportunities and messaging to build relationships and share/gather relevant and important information about Kandiyohi County economic development and the work of the KCED.

*VISION OF IMPACT: Kandiyohi County KCED is recognized as a leader in driving economic opportunity, growth, and prosperity in the county, state and beyond.*

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## GOAL: KCED Organizational Development

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The KCED will continually evaluate, leverage, and acquire the programs, human and financial resources necessary to serve as the catalyst for economic growth of the greater Kandiyohi County area.

**Guiding Leaders:** KCED staff and boards

**Key Partners:** Local lenders, lending partners, entrepreneurs, businesses, agriculture organizations and producers

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- **Staffing:** Ensure the KCED has sufficient talent to support its strategic objectives now and into the future through consideration of additional staff and succession planning for key positions, including the Executive Director.
- **Organizational Structure:** Strategically assess and align the leadership needed to implement the KCED Goals and Objectives over the next three to five years and beyond. This may include restructuring committees, determining the strengths needed to guide and support the work of each committee, and working to engage the right people and adequate resources.
- **Financial Resources:** Continually determine needs and seek to acquire the financial resources to support the work of the KCED and Kandiyohi County economic development through grant opportunities, levy requests, and other funding opportunities.
- **Partnerships:** Accelerate collaboration among Kandiyohi County public and private entities to elevate regional thinking/approaches.

*VISION OF IMPACT: Kandiyohi County KCED is positioned to serve as a leader in driving economic opportunity, growth, and prosperity in the county, state, and beyond.*

## Strategic Objectives, Tactics and Outcomes: 2023-2024

The goals and strategic objectives above are established to guide the KCED's efforts over the next three to five years. The KCED will annually determine the specific objectives and tactics that are most urgent and/or have the greatest potential impact. Below are the 2023-2024 strategic objectives and tactics that the KCED will pursue.

### Housing Development 2023-2024

#### TACTICS

1. Share housing studies with communities and entities throughout Kandiyohi County.
2. Outreach and discussion with at least 50% of incorporated communities in the county via city council, economic development, or other community gatherings.
  - Participate in follow-up discussions regarding specific housing opportunities for at least three communities.
  - Help interested communities evaluate and improve zoning requirements to allow expanded opportunities, such as accessory dwelling units, smaller lot sizes, and other innovative solutions.
3. Work with communities to explore opportunities and resources for maximizing the use and quality of existing housing stock.
  - Work with developers/property owners to incentivize rehabilitation of existing stock.
4. Provide support to and awareness of the Willmar Housing Task Force as they study and determine the features of a countywide, public-private housing development coalition that would best serve the interests of all Kandiyohi County cities.

#### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- At least 50% of communities in the county are informed through housing study data.
- At least three communities receive focused support to plan for specific housing opportunities.
- At least two communities/developers explore programs to help rehabilitate existing housing stock.

### Broadband Development 2023-2024

#### TACTICS

1. Facilitate collaborative efforts related to recent grant funding for broadband efforts in the county (i.e., Border-to-Border Grant projects, Line Extension Grant, etc.).
2. Provide information and awareness to communities, townships, and residents on how these efforts apply to them and determine potential needs for education/training.
3. Continue to support the execution of broadband initiatives occurring in Kandiyohi County.

#### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- Support of broadband projects currently in process/funded and/or awaiting funding notifications and development (serving a total of nearly 4,500 locations).
- Speed maps reflect 50% of Kandiyohi County at 100 Mbps down/20 Mbps up.
- Communities have begun to identify educational/training needs to advance broadband use.
- Equal access to education, healthcare, business, and spiritual opportunities is advanced.

## Workforce Development 2023-2024

### TACTICS

1. Expand awareness of local careers by supporting at least two job fairs and highlighting workforce opportunities on the KCED website.
2. Work with schools and businesses to expose at least 200 high school students to various businesses and industries in Kandiyohi County.
3. Build an employment/workforce resource web page that showcases the workforce advantages in the County (i.e., cost of living; amenities).
4. Work with area businesses and supporting organizations to develop strategies for retaining, recruiting, and/or planning for the succession of leaders.

### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- At least 100 individuals and 40 businesses participate in virtual and in-person job fairs.
- At least 200 high school students indicate that they are more aware of career/work opportunities in Kandiyohi County.
- A new web page is underway to showcase workforce advantages of Kandiyohi County.
- At least one collaborative discussion takes place regarding opportunities to assist businesses with employee recruitment, retention or succession.

## Child Care Advancement 2023-2024

### TACTICS

1. Explore opportunities for collaboration around shared positions to support child care efforts.
2. Determine if a child care development project coordinator position may be needed to shepherd collaborative efforts and if yes, help assess how to fund/structure the position.
3. Support the RCCIP in planning to establish key strategies for addressing child care needs and determine the role of the KCED in supporting these efforts.
4. Assist with a revolving strategy for funding census innovation to be ready for census years.

### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- Community partners have a unified vision and strategies for addressing child care and census needs over the next two to three years.
- Engaged organizations are positioned with the capacity required to coordinate efforts.

## Business and Industry Development 2023-2024

### TACTICS

1. Continued outreach in Kandiyohi County leads to supporting at least three businesses that have not utilized KCED technical assistance and/or lending services in the past.
2. Expanded outreach increases the total amount of loan funds provided to support the growth/expansion of Kandiyohi County businesses.
3. Enhance and expand the Elevate Community Business Academy by designing the program to also accommodate Somalian entrepreneurs and by increasing the number of participants.
4. Work with agricultural organizations to host and/or support informational session(s) regarding Minnesota's climate legislation/plans.

### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- At least five businesses that have not utilized KCED technical assistance and/or lending services in the past, are supported through technical assistance and/or loan funds.

- The total amount of loan funds distributed by the end of 2023 increases by at least 10% over the previous year.
- Elevate program increases the total number of program students by at least 25% and works to accommodate Somalian entrepreneurs in 2024.
- Informational session(s) inform at least 200 individuals from organizations across the county/region.

## Marketing, Communications, and Public Relations 2023-2024

### TACTICS

1. Complete updating of the KCED brand/logo/website while ensuring alignment/consistency with other applicable county rebranding efforts.
2. Provide regular and relevant content through social media and a newsletter.
3. Advance outreach efforts in rural cities and townships through invitations to KCED events/meetings and participation in events throughout the county.
4. Develop an activity calendar for the KCED website that links existing economic/workforce development activities/resources.

### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- The KCED is better positioned with a new identity that presents a memorable impression and helps convey the value of the KCED.
- Businesses and community advocates are better informed of the work of the KCED and key economic trends and workforce activities through advanced communications and outreach.

## KCED Organizational Development 2023-2024

### TACTICS

1. Support staff by providing professional development opportunities to advance skills and knowledge.
2. Restructure committees to align with strategic planning goals and staffing efficiencies.
3. Exploration and planning of near-term staffing needs and discussions with potential partners for shared positions.
4. Determining and acquiring resources to support additional staff, if need is determined.
5. Developing and updating job descriptions, roles, and responsibilities.

### PROJECTED OUTCOMES

- Committees best support organizational goals and objectives.
- KCED boasts staff with the expertise and capacity to effectively meet the needs of those they serve.