

Harlan County Lake

What's on the Horizon?

2025 Annual Report



Celebrating 20 Years: Embracing Tomorrow

The 2025 Annual Report highlights the stories and successes of the past year, but I find myself reminiscing more about the last 20 years. December 1, 2005, began my journey as the first and only employee of this new regional organization, the South Central Economic Development District. Founded through the vision and work of many leaders at state, county, and local levels, SCEDD has grown into a regional resource shaping vibrant communities! Thank you to all who partnered with us: board members, county and local officials, and community leaders. **Your contributions have made a meaningful impact.**

In the early years of SCEDD, much of my time was spent driving from town to town across our 13 counties, introducing the mission and purpose of this new entity and services available. The future that awaited SCEDD was greater than anyone envisioned.

I'm reminded that progress often begins with a simple willingness to imagine what's possible. This principle comes to life in every town visioning workshop, where communities shape their future and unlock potential to spark innovation, collaboration, and results.

Today, the SCEDD region stands poised for a horizon of exciting possibilities, where every project meets today's challenges and creates tomorrow's opportunities. These stories demonstrate what happens when a team of committed individuals or an entire community chooses to look beyond the familiar and embrace the future together. **As you imagine what's ahead, trust SCEDD to help turn that vision into reality.**



Sharon Hueftle
Executive Director

Table of Contents

Director's Letter	2
A Bright Horizon for the SCEDD Region.....	3
Recovery & Resiliency Through Clean-Up	4
CDBG Economic Development in Action	5
Community Engagement Services	6
Community Revitalization Services	7
Housing Groundwork	8
Project Results.....	9
Expanding Horizons	10
SCEDD Team.....	11
Regional Recognition	11
SCEDD Regional Impact.....	12

Two Decades of SCEDD Impact: By the Numbers

46
housing units
funded with
\$8.7M
Rural Workforce
Housing loans

Funded
through grants:

37
new rentals

6
new spec homes

55
rehab

\$61M
in grants
awarded

Each **\$1** of dues
resulted in
\$44 of
investments in
the region

Activity at a Glance: Statewide Project Impact Map

Nebraska's eight economic development districts contribute strategic direction and advocacy through the Nebraska Regional Official's Council (NROC). Explore the new NROC Impact Map to see how statewide programs and projects from 2023-2025 are driving progress and growth.

Visit: www.nrocne.com/nroc-impact-map

We invite communities and leaders to discover successful project opportunities and new possibilities. Search by project type or location. Connect with SCEDD to start the conversation!



NROC
Nebraska Regional
Officials Council



A Bright Horizon for the SCEDD Region



Community Economic Development Forum Brings Elected & Appointed Leaders Together



Elected and appointed leaders strategizing on regional solutions at the CED Forum

On November 5, SCEDD hosted our annual forum with community leaders to share information, garner feedback, and present new programs and trends in the region. The event host, City of Gibbon, featured the beautiful newly renovated City Hall and Community Center made possible in part through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development–Civic and Community Center Financing Fund (CCCCFF).

Topics discussed included SCEDD's upcoming 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), alternative funding opportunities and options given the current government funding climate, housing struggles and solutions, and building strong, prosperous communities.

What's on the Horizon?

- ♦ Innovation
- ♦ Collaboration
- ♦ Action & Results

I appreciated the opportunity to meet other community leaders, make connections, share ideas, and discuss the challenges and successes happening across our region. I especially valued learning about LB840 and alternative funding opportunities available in today's funding climate.

Lisa Woodgate, Executive Director
St. Paul Development Corporation

CEDS 2026: Region's SWOT Analysis

Every five years, the United States Economic Development Agency (EDA) directs economic development districts to submit a CEDS that culminates in the development of a strategic action plan. To begin work on the CEDS, **SCEDD conducted a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) survey of city administrators, economic developers, elected officials, and employees at the municipal and county levels within the 13-county region.**

SCEDD REGION: TOP 3 MOST IMPACTFUL SWOT ITEMS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Agricultural Sector	Lack of Affordable Entry-Level Housing	Creation of New Housing Units	Aging Population
Natural Resources	Lack of Child Care Services	Attraction/Retention of Young Families/Workers	Loss of Young Adults to Metro Areas
Quality of Life	Aging/Dilapidated Housing Inventory	Housing Rehabilitation	Rising Healthcare Costs

SCEDD will facilitate topic-driven stakeholder meetings in 2026 on the prioritized topics of **housing, people capital** (including **child care** and **workforce**), **infrastructure**, and **environmental disruptions**. Input from engaged leaders and partners across the region will guide the CEDS Action Plan for the next 5 years. This plan will serve to open doors for communities to federal and state funding to continue initiatives for prosperous growth in the south central Nebraska region.



Recovery & Resiliency through Clean-Up

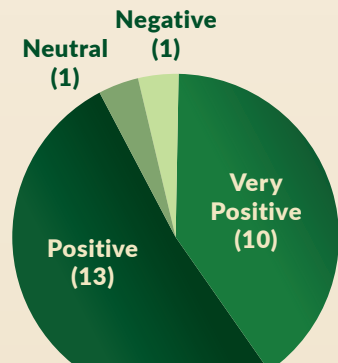
A Cause Worth Contributing To



Village of Orleans
Visioning Session
August 2025

SCEDD facilitated a Town Visioning session in Orleans, population 323, where the Village demonstrated strong support for community clean-up initiatives. Sixty donors, both local and beyond, stepped up to contribute \$74,650 in cash pledges. Thirteen entities contributed \$36,350 in skilled labor and equipment for an impressive **\$136,000 cash match towards a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant application!** If funded, park habitat will be restored around the historic library with the addition of a pollinator garden and new trees. Planned waste management activities include demolition of 12 prominent buildings.

The goal is to transform vacant, deteriorated properties into vibrant, development-ready spaces.



If community clean-up of empty and/or dilapidated buildings were addressed, what impact would this have for our community?

Transformation through Demolition: Community Collaboration & Partnerships



SCEDD was awarded a **Nebraska Environmental Trust grant** in 2024 for waste management

to address debris and dilapidated buildings in three communities. The results are transformational for these communities and are changing the dialogue. Before, residents would warily look at worn down and forgotten houses in their neighborhood and ask, "Will anything be done about these properties?" Now, residents are forward-looking and asking, *"What can be developed on these lots?!"*

Demolition of dilapidated house in Upland by Evans Construction



Waste Management Activities Completed on Properties

- 16 in Franklin
- 21 in Stamford
- 10 in Upland
- 30 houses, 23 garages & sheds demolished
- 20 vehicles & two travel trailers removed
- **2,506 tons of waste removed**

EPA Brownfields Grant to Transform 1917 Middle School to Needed Rental Housing

The City of Hastings was awarded a \$475,000 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Cleanup Grant to remove asbestos from its former middle school. The building will be transformed into contemporary rental housing utilizing layers of funding from a variety of sources. SCEDD will manage the grant through its completion in 2029.

We encourage communities to explore Brownfields grants as a potential resource to address necessary environmental clean-up.

1st Brownfields Cleanup Grant awarded to a Nebraska recipient since 2013

1st Brownfields grant awarded to a recipient in SCEDD region since Harvard's assessment grant in 2007

4th-ever cleanup grant awarded to a Nebraska recipient



Community Development Block Grant

Economic Development in Action

Grant Funds Support & Strengthen Communities

SCEDD works alongside communities to develop competitive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applications, administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. In 2025, these municipalities were awarded grant funds to undertake the following activities:



- **City of Gibbon:** Planning Grant of \$53,000 to complete a comprehensive plan, blight study, and update zoning ordinances.
- **City of Gibbon:** Downtown Revitalization Grant of \$435,000 to implement commercial rehabilitation, sidewalk improvement, and street improvement activities.
- **City of Minden:** Planning Grant of \$53,000 to conduct a study of the City's existing water treatment and distribution system.
- **City of Nelson:** Public Works Grant of \$620,000 to implement a street improvement project within the community.

CDBG funds are integral to the continued improvement of eligible communities!



NOW

...is the perfect time to connect and learn more about your community's CDBG eligibility!

Bright Horizons for Area Businesses!

Thanks to solid business plans, visionary business leaders, and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds (Economic Development category), businesses in the SCEDD region are expanding operations while creating new full-time jobs! Grants are awarded to local governments and then sub-awarded to the designated business.

- **Hall County–Hornady Manufacturing:**
\$1 million awarded to support the growth of manufacturing.
- **City of Hastings–Bruckman Rubber:**
\$350,000 awarded to assist in the development of a new dog toy manufacturing line.

Three additional businesses are awaiting funding announcements.



Bruckman Rubber was awarded funds to assist in the development of a new dog toy manufacturing line

**FULL TIME
JOBS
CREATED**

29

HALL COUNTY

10

CITY OF HASTINGS

City of Sutton Receives USDA Grant

The City of Sutton was the successful recipient of a \$300,000 USDA Rural Economic Development Grant (REDG) in 2025 to create a local revolving loan fund program. The newly created fund will make its first loan to the Sutton Community Home to assist in renovation and expansion efforts of the 31-bed facility. Sutton contributed \$60,000 in match to the REDG fund which remains local and available to eligible businesses. These funds are made available through a competitive process to eligible rural utility service providers.





Community Engagement Services

Community Surveys: Positioning for Tomorrow

Strong citizen engagement is essential for communities seeking funding opportunities. SCEDD facilitates public participation by conducting **Community Needs Assessment Surveys (CNAS)**. The process gathers opinions on important local topics and guides strategic planning

- A cross-section of stakeholders selects relevant questions for community-wide participation.
- Survey questions address housing, business, child care, education, municipal services and local initiatives.
- Actionable input forms the basis for strategic plans and potential grant applications.
- An in-depth written report and interactive Town Hall presentation provide a road map to a preferred future.
- Contact SCEDD to discuss how a CNAS can accelerate your community's progress!

Four vacant homes popped up for sale within a month of our town hall. It had a direct impact!

Kristy Rosendahl, GROW Hildreth

Visit scedd.us/community-engagement for recent CNAS Examples

What is your Community Story?

Is it time to focus on a bright future?

Invite SCEDD to facilitate a

★ **STARR** ★

Town Visioning

(Small Towns Achieving Recovery & Resiliency)

Chart your future and set a vision into action!

Income Surveys

The CDBG is a funding tool often utilized in communities for public works, public facilities, and planning projects. The main eligibility requirement for these programs is the percent of a municipality's population that is low-moderate income (LMI), as reported by the Census Bureau every 5 years. Sometimes what is reported doesn't align with what the community is experiencing and it is necessary to challenge the reported LMI percentage. The City of Nelson and Village of Stamford did just that.

Through a random sample income survey, communities can partner with SCEDD to gather accurate data on local income levels. If results prove the community meets the income eligibility threshold for CDBG funding, SCEDD submits the data, securing eligibility for the next five years.

Income Surveys can readily be incorporated into a CNAS!

Initiate a Housing Study: Know What You Need

Central City utilized SCEDD services to access a NIFA grant to complete a Comprehensive Housing Study which defines the housing needs in their community. This investment directly impacted the city's ability to compete and receive the 2025 Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund grant of \$840,000 for the construction of new multi-family rentals.

SCEDD conducts Comprehensive Housing Studies for a municipality as a contracted service. The Study includes stakeholder interviews and survey results from realtors, landlords, and employers while working collaboratively with local leaders to define the needs. Current state, regional, and national data is woven together to provide priorities to address each community's unique and defined needs.

Visit scedd.us/housing to view recent Housing Studies

Community Revitalization Services



Partner with SCEDD to Address the Cost of Complacency

1

Reclaiming Community Assets

through community outreach
and education to bring
voluntary action

2

Nuisance Abatement Program

addressing significant clean-up
issues of commercial
and residential properties

3

Vacant Property Registry

disincentivizes idle properties
through an
established fee structure

INNOVATIVE SERVICES TO MEET YOUR COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Innovation in Action: Reclaiming Community Assets

EDUCATE EMPOWER PROBLEM SOLVE

*This locally driven program
can deliver results at a
fraction of the cost of
traditional clean-up efforts!*

Vacant homes aren't just eyesores; they're lost opportunities. Every empty property drags down assessed values and invites decline. The longer it sits, the higher the cost.

SCEDD's **Reclaiming Community Assets** program flips the script. Through community engagement and outreach providing incentives to homeowners, revitalization can be accelerated. While disincentive programs are an option, starting with a community task force approach can result in positive action to help towns unlock hidden potential with the release or renovation of a vacant home.

ACT NOW!

Every idle property is a lost chance to strengthen your community!

Property Turnaround Initiative: Investing in the Nuisance Abatement Program

Properties Cleaned
Up Voluntarily

144

Properties
Abated

18

Average Abatement
Cost per Property

\$1,506

2025 Nuisance Abatement Program Work in 7 Communities



BEFORE



AFTER

As Mayor, I've seen firsthand how our nuisance abatement program—supported through SCEDD's resources and guidance—transforms neighborhoods. Together, we've tackled unsafe and neglected properties, restoring value and pride to our blocks. Because of this partnership, Superior isn't just cleaner; it's safer and more welcoming, and people are eager to invest and participate in our community's future.

Rick Disney, City of Superior Mayor

Invest in Action: Vacant Property Registry (VPR)

When incentives are ineffective, communities are not stuck—there is another tool to revitalize vacant properties. VPR disincentivizes owner inaction by implementing an escalating fee structure. Hiring SCEDD to manage VPR means unlocking underutilized properties to put into active housing inventory, boosting neighborhood safety, and fueling community pride.

The goal is to transform vacant, deteriorated properties into vibrant, development-ready spaces. Reduce long-term vacancies and declining property values through proven strategies using VPR.



Turn obstacles to progress into opportunities for growth!



Housing Groundwork

A “New” Place to Call Home: Upper-Story Living in Downtown Minden

The restoration and conversion of a vacant, dilapidated structure built in 1886 on Minden’s historic courthouse square is nearly complete! The results: two newly renovated commercial storefronts and five new upper story apartments. This project was funded in part by a **Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund** grant to the City of Minden.

From a 2023 Workforce Housing Solutions meeting, hosted by the City of Minden and SCEDD, employers said all types of workforce housing—especially quality rental units—were needed for the community and businesses to grow. Zu Haus Flats is a culmination of many partners recognizing the possibilities and then acting with tangible results: new workforce housing.

Zu Haus FLATS

New upper-story apartments

Downtown Minden
overlooking the beautiful courthouse square.

All appliances including washer/dryer provided.
Monthly rent includes ALL utilities and fiber internet service.

OPENS
FEBRUARY
2026

Scan for
Application
info!

NEBRASKA
DEPT. OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Funded in part through
Nebraska Affordable
Housing Trust Fund
In partnership with:

The
City of
Minden

SCEDD

SCEDD Drives Growth Through HomeNE Network

HomeNE offers an informal learning environment complemented by valuable insights and solutions for housing development. Each month’s webinar features presenter(s) from across Nebraska and beyond who share housing stories, experiences, and, yes, sometimes even tough lessons learned.

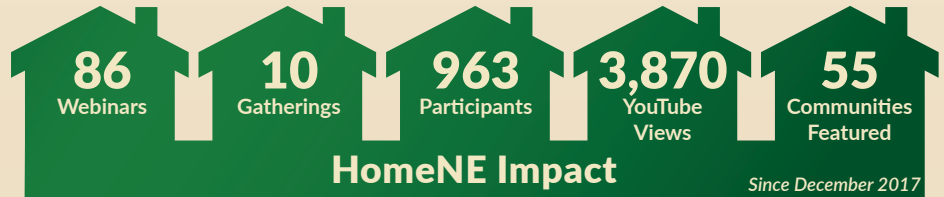
**3rd Thursday
Monthly Webinars
at 2:00 PM**

**Sign up & Explore
HomeNE.us**

HomeNE has been an incredibly useful resource in helping guide Ord and Valley County to address housing, property redevelopment, and revitalization needs.”

Caleb Pollard, Executive Director,
Valley County Economic Development

HomeNE
Learning Network



Ribbon Cuttings Celebrate Housing Results



The City of Wood River’s NAHTF project to create 3 upper-story apartments helped address the need for affordable workforce housing. The apartments opened in August with a waitlist for tenants.



The Village of Clarks Community Development Agency partnered with SCEDD for a RWH Fund application. The CDA constructed the first spec home in decades, listing the 3 bed, 2 bath, 2 car garage home for \$279,000.





Impressive Park Amenities Added Through Rural Community Recovery Program

Preparedness meets opportunity as both Franklin and St. Paul had identified needs in their city parks, had local leadership on board, and were able to capitalize on the Department of Economic Development Rural Community Recovery Program one-time grant. Competitive applications demonstrated public input and need, project readiness, and leadership support.



City of Franklin received \$535,000 for the creation of the City Park Library patio and the addition of fitness stations, a music playground, and disc golf course.



City of St. Paul awarded \$875,000 for a new 3-court tennis/pickleball court (pictured), toddler music playground, picnic shelters, and connecting sidewalks for accessibility.



Wood River's Legacy Station Nearing Completion



The first multi-generational community center of its kind in Nebraska is a continuation of the community of Wood River's previous redevelopment efforts that

began with the renovation of a former skilled nursing facility. When complete, the City's Library, Food Pantry, and Senior Center will relocate into newly renovated spaces

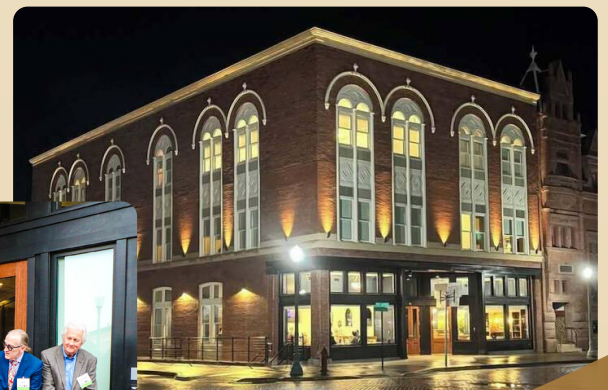
alongside the Stick Creek Kids Child Development Center. The Legacy Station brings all four services together under one roof. This will expand access and strengthen support for residents of all ages and backgrounds.

The Senior Center component is partially funded through a CDBG awarded to the City of Wood River. SCEDD supported the City in securing the project funding and serves as the CDBG administrator.

Red Cloud's Hotel Garber Breathes New Life Into Downtown

Once known as the Potter-Wright building, today's Hotel Garber shines brightly in downtown Red Cloud. After a 1961 fire destroyed the third story, the building sat vacant with limited use over the decades as the once-prominent downtown structure deteriorated and become unusable.

In April 2025, a long-awaited ribbon cutting marked the opening of 28 boutique hotel rooms and a mixed-use venue. Red Cloud, home to Willa Cather and the Cather Center, draws more than 10,000 visitors each year. CDBG Tourism Development funds supported the completion of the Hotel's public spaces, with SCEDD serving as the CDBG administrator.





Expanding Horizons

EDA Awards Infrastructure Improvement Funds to City of Kearney

A FEMA disaster declaration, following a damaging windstorm in Buffalo County, provided the opportunity to pursue an EDA Disaster Relief grant. The City of Kearney secured \$2.6 million of an \$3.2 million project to install infrastructure in its northeast industrial area. Construction is expected to begin in early 2026, paving the way for future industrial growth. SCEDD partnered with the City, Development Council for Buffalo County, and Miller & Associates to make this project possible.

6 REGIONS One Nebraska

SCEDD Contributes to Numerous Successful 6 Regions One Nebraska Initiatives

As part of the **6 Regions One Nebraska** (6R1NE) initiative launched in 2024, SCEDD staff have contributed to the earliest planning meetings in the designated Central Region through the development and implementation to advance priority projects in Child Care, Housing, and Workforce.

Child Care Champions: Bringing Quality Child Care to the Region!

In 2025 twenty newly licensed in-home child care providers with over 220 child care slots across the Central Region have been supported with this program developed in committee

Child Care Crisis costs Nebraska \$1.74 billion annually.
Over 6,800 jobs lost due to child care workforce disruptions.
Source: First Five Nebraska

with Lori Ferguson, SCEDD Community Consultant, as a key contributor. Over \$50,000 in stipends were paid out to these child care providers who are stepping up to care for our kids! Buffalo County Community Partners oversees the financial aspect of the initiative.

Cost of Complacency Cohort Tackles Vacant Homes

The Central Region Housing priority addresses the Cost of Complacency—the price communities pay when vacant homes are left idle. In a partnership with the Mid-Plains

Region, fourteen individuals are learning strategies to move these properties from vacant to vibrant by connecting owners with solutions. SCEDD Executive Director Sharon Hueftle led the initial training and continues to facilitate bi-monthly calls.

Recruitment of Young Workforce: Trades on the Move



STEM youth workshop courtesy of The Edgerton Explorit Center

The Edgerton Explorit Center in Aurora was awarded funding from Central Community College to develop a program initiated through 6R1NE planning. The Edgerton/CCC Trades Science Program gives students across Nebraska the opportunity to roll up their sleeves, pick up real tools, and discover the science behind the trades. Through hands-on labs and demonstrations, students explore

construction, welding, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical systems—while also strengthening their understanding of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Visit <https://edgerton.org> to discuss hosting a **Trades on the Move** event to empower the next generation of Nebraska's skilled workforce.

Innovative Workforce Retention Tools Across the Region

The challenge of population decline and youth migration to metropolitan areas has prompted rural communities to implement innovative retention initiatives aimed at sustaining growth and opportunity.

- **Phelps County Development Corporation** uses LB840 funds and has awarded 109 high demand job scholarships to high school graduates since 2014. Graduates returning in welding, manufacturing, electrical, plumbing, health care, and education are prioritized.

- **Aurora High School** partners seniors with diverse businesses and industries for hometown internships to gain skills to zero-in on their career field of interest.
- **Ravenna Economic Development Corporation**—engraves stainless steel water bottles '*Home is where the heart is...Ravenna*' and gifts to every graduating high school senior.
- **Sandy Creek School District** incorporates state-of-the-art career academies through their Nebraska Center for Advanced Professional Studies (NCAPS) facility for grades 7-12.



Board of Directors

Joe Patterson	Adams County Board Member
Bill Maendele	Buffalo County Board Member
Barb Barnett	Clay County Zoning Administrator, SCEDD President
Raquel Felzien	Franklin County, Franklin City Clerk, SCEDD Secretary
Becky Rother	Hall County, Grand Island Area Economic Development Corporation
Jessie Merkel	Hamilton County Board Member
Joe Schnuerle	Harlan County Board Member
Kirt Lukasiewicz	Howard County Board Member
Robert Swanson	Kearney County Board Member
Edward Dexter	Merrick County Board Member, SCEDD Vice President
Dave Musmann	Nuckolls County Board Member
Theresa Puls	Phelps County Board Member, SCEDD Treasurer
Tricia Allen	Webster County, Alternating, Blue Hill City Clerk
Gene Horne	Webster County, Alternating, Red Cloud City Mayor
Linda Glause	Mortgage Loan Underwriter, Five Points Bank
Marni Danhauer	Associate Dean of Extended Learning Services Training, Central Community College



Board Meeting in December, 2025:
[L-R] Joe Schnuerle, Edward Dexter, Robert Swanson, Barb Barnett, Linda Glause, Joe Patterson, Tricia Allen, Raquel Felzien, Kirt Lukasiewicz, Theresa Puls

Regional Recognition

Governor Pillen Honors the Stamford Newsletter Ladies



Serve Nebraska recognized the “Stamford Newsletter Ladies” as the 2025 Volunteer Group Award Winner for their extraordinary dedication to community service. For nearly six decades, this remarkable team has kept Stamford and its extended community informed, engaged, and connected. Their work goes far beyond publishing a newsletter as it preserves local history, fosters a sense of belonging, and strengthens relationships in a town that values tradition and neighbors. SCEDD was proud to nominate this inspiring group for this well-deserved honor.

Hastings Shines as 2025 Showcase Community



Hastings Showcase Award
KC Belitz, Shannon Landauer, Sydney Erickson, Governor Jim Pillen & Mayor Jay Beckby

In April, Governor Pillen awarded the Governor’s Showcase Community Award to the City of Hastings. According to the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Showcase honor is given annually to a Nebraska community that has “distinguished itself through projects to enhance quality of life and encourage economic growth.”

STAFF



Sharon Hueftle
Executive Director
sharonh@scedd.us
308.455.4771



LeAnn Jochum
Deputy Director
leann@scedd.us
308.455.4776



Lori Ferguson
Community Consultant
lorif@scedd.us
308.455.4772



Howard Wong
Community Consultant
howard@scedd.us
308.455.4773



Sheri Alber
Fiscal Officer
sheri@scedd.us
308.455.4774



Kristy Borden
Grant Assistant
kristy@scedd.us
308.455.4769



Jill Schroeder
Executive Assistant
admin@scedd.us
308.270.3300

Steps to Success

