INRCOG

Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments

2027-2031

Strategic Plan

Adopted by the INRCOG Executive Committee on:

November 19, 2026



I. Executive Summary

The Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments (INRCOG) was created under Iowa Code Chapters 28H and 28E, serving as a regional planning and development organization that supports member cities and counties. INRCOG leads in transportation planning, housing and community development, hazard mitigation, and grant administration.

This plan outlines a five-year framework that builds upon the agency's legacy of collaboration and expertise to prepare for future workforce transitions.

In addition, this strategic plan outlines an approach to ensuring leadership continuity, staff development, and sustained delivery of high-quality services to member governments across the region.

Finally, the plan focuses on proactive board member involvement, professional development, and organizational resilience to meet the evolving needs of our region's cities and counties.

II. Agency Overview

As a public agency established in 1973 under Chapters 28H and 28E of the Iowa Code, the Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments (INRCOG) serves a six-county area in northeastern Iowa. INRCOG is a voluntary association of local governments in Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Chickasaw and Grundy Counties. Currently, 54 cities and all six counties are members of our organization. Membership is geographically limited to these counties and each participating local government that wishes to join does so through payment of an annual per capita dues assessment.

Under the INRCOG "umbrella", the agency manages or staffs the Black Hawk County Metropolitan Planning Organization, Iowa Northland Regional Transportation Authority, Iowa Northland Regional Economic Development, Iowa Northland Regional Housing Council, INRCOG Safe Routes to School Program, Emergency Food and Shelter Programs, and the Iowa Northland Regional Transit Commission (aka On Board Public Transit). Also, the agency administers fiscal services for the Waterloo and Cedar Falls Housing Trust Funds. Specifically, the services INRCOG provides to its members include plan preparation and implementation, ordinance and policy drafting, grant writing and administration, project identification and development, creation of public policy programs, and technical assistance to our member communities.

Our agency is proud of the longstanding, formidable relationships we have built with numerous federal and state departments, as we have administered numerous programs on behalf of our local government members. Included amongst those agencies are the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA); US Department of Agriculture; Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Iowa Economic Development Authority; Iowa Department of Transportation; Iowa Department of Natural Resources; Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management; and the Iowa Finance Authority.

Finally, our agency has developed relationships with many school districts in the region and with numerous non-profit organizations, including administration of housing-related grants which involves working directly with several entities such as the Black Hawk County Gaming Association, Otto Schoitz Foundation, Waterloo Foundation, the Northeast Iowa Commun ity Foundation, Salvation Army, Iowa Heartland Habitat for Humanity, Cedar Valley Friends of the Family, Operation Threshold, Exceptional Persons, Inc., Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging, Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation, and House of Hope.

The following plan defines our Mission and Vision Statements, provides a self-examination of the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and lists potential actions deemed important for the next five years. Obviously, as our members request and as changes are necessary, the actions may be adjusted accordingly. Also, it is important to indicate that not all actions may be able to be implemented because of budget constraints, political and community preferences, and staffing abilities. With that said, this plan outlines the anticipated course of action for the agency as it serves its member local governments.

III. Guiding Principles

Mission Statement

The Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments is an association of local governments that is committed to identifying, securing, and coordinating local, regional, and federal government projects and programs for the enhancement of our region and member communities.

Vision

The Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments envisions a thriving, resilient, and interconnected region where strong local governments, effective regional partnerships, and innovative, sustainable, solutions create vibrant communities and an exceptional quality of life for all residents.

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the plan is to guide the agency, notably the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Executive Director, and staff for the next five calendar years, 2027-2031. Within that timeframe it is anticipated that there will be staffing challenges, including departures and retirements, as well as financial and political challenges resulting from uncertainty at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

IV. Situation Analysis

Environmental Scan

Statewide and regional workforce data show increasing retirements among experienced public administrators, planners, and technical staff. At the same time, member governments are requesting expanded services in infrastructure, housing, and economic development.
These trends demand strong internal capacity and succession planning to maintain service quality.

Internal Assessment

An internal review identified several critical positions at risk due to upcoming retirements and turnover.

Current succession efforts are informal and limited, with significant institutional knowledge concentrated among a few senior staff members. Cross training and documentation are inconsistent, creating potential vulnerabilities during transitions.

SWOT Analysis

As part of the environmental scan and internal analysis, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis was conducted. The summary of said analysis is provided below

Strengths:
Experienced leadership and institutional knowledge; strong member relationships; diverse funding sources.

Weaknesses:
Limited succession planning; small staff size; dependency on specific program expertise.

Opportunities:
Staff development partnerships with Iowa COGs, member communities, state agencies, and universities; rising demand for technical assistance and grant management.

Threats:
Loss of experienced staff; competitive labor market; wage pressures; funding source uncertainty.

V. Strategic Focus Areas & Goals

External Priorities



Goal 1: Regional Development and Partnerships

Objectives:

1. Serve our member local governments by identifying and implementing program and funding opportunities.
2. Maintain and build regional development partnerships and plans with members and other organizations to strengthen the region
3. Serve as a resource for local government in our region.
4. Act as an extension of our local government staff, as well as those of the state and federal governments regarding implementing their specific programs.

Key Actions:

- Research and present program information to our member local governments; working cooperatively to the benefit of our region;
- Consider moving meeting locations around the region;
- Revisit and possibly adjust governing structures of committees, commissions, and boards as their purpose dictates or changes;
- Market our expertise and skills to our members as well as public through various outlets;
- Partner with other regions, agencies, and the state and federal government agencies to identify and implement projects and programs;
- Contact each INRCOG member at least annually; and
- Develop partnerships with School Districts, Non-profit organizations, and other non-government entities, as is appropriate and necessary.



Goal 2: Ensure Service Continuity, Quality, and Fiscal Responsibility

Objectives:

1. Provide uninterrupted, consistent, valued, professional service to our member governments.
2. Invest in staff training, education, and cross training such that our agency is viewed as a statewide leader and the first choice for assistance for our local governments.
3. Continue to provide and offer transparent, accountable, and financially responsible services and programs that meet and or exceed government accounting and audit standards.
4. Monitor service performance and member satisfaction.
5. As a tenant of fiscal responsibility, maintain the existing INRCOG property and vehicles, including RTC/On Board vehicles. Budget for repairs, replacement, and improvements as the opportunity and need arises.

Key Actions:

- Research and present program information to our member local governments; working cooperatively to the benefit of our region;
- Market our expertise, programs, and skills to our members as well as informing the public through various outlets;
- Partner with other regions and the state and federal government agencies to identify and implement new projects and programs;
- Conduct business in a financially transparent and professional manner; and
- Ensure professional consistency of products between staff members.

Internal Priorities



Goal 1: Build Organizational Resilience and Capacity

Objectives:

1. Align staffing capacity with future program and funding opportunities.
2. Maintain a sustainable balance between personnel costs and service revenues.
3. Foster a culture of adaptability and innovation.

Key Actions:

- Integrate internal workforce planning into annual budgeting;
- Pursue joint staffing and/or programs with other councils of governments as may be feasible;
- Support innovation initiatives that may benefit our members and the agency;
- Maintain INRCOG assets;
- Maintain and upgrade equipment, software and training in order to keep INRCOG competitive in our member services and offerings; and
- Continue to refine and enhance the development of individual work plans prepared by each staff member.



Goal 2: Establish a Comprehensive Staff Succession Program

Objectives:

1. Identify critical roles and risk areas within the organization.
2. Develop position-specific succession and knowledge transfer plans (operating procedures).
3. Create a mentorship program pairing senior and emerging staff.
4. Document key operational and procedural knowledge.

Key Actions:

- Develop and assign standard operating procedures descriptions, checklists; and information sources;
- Conduct annual workforce risk assessments;
- Promote leadership development opportunities for staff;
- Encourage job shadowing and cross-training;
- Utilize individual work plans assembled by staff for evaluating readiness for staff promotion; and
- Continuously evaluate and update our Employee Handbook, associated policies and procedures such that the agency remains compliant and competitive.



Goal 3: Strengthen Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Objectives:

1. Continuously improve INRCOG's ability to attract qualified staff across all of its disciplines.
2. Create clear career pathways and opportunities for professional growth.
3. Maintain, and enhance workplace flexibility and be mindful that agency culture is a key staff retention strategy.

Key Actions:

- Establish internships with Iowa colleges, schools and universities;
- Continue to conduct compensation reviews;
- Market our agency and the expertise of staff;
- Continue to refine and adapt workforce policies to maintain compliance, remain relevant, and stay competitive; and
- Continue to compare job descriptions, essential functions, titles, and responsibilities of persons employed outside of INRCOG with our requirements and expectations.

VI. Implementation Framework

Responsible Parties: INRCOG Board of Directors and Executive Committee, Executive Director, and Department Heads

Timeline: Five-year plan

Resources Needed: staff time and research, training time and funds, digital management tools, and budget resources

Performance Measures:

- Identifying key positions and timelines for developing succession plans for each;
- Analyzing staff turnover rate by position;
- Polling and prioritizing member satisfaction;
- Tracking applicant numbers, skills, and vacancy fill time; tracking compensation levels, as well as gathering compensation comparables, both in salary and benefits.

VII. Plan Approval and Amendment

The INRCOG Strategic Plan may be adopted as a policy instrument for the agency by a simple majority vote of the Executive Committee or Board of Directors.

The plan may be amended from time to time, as is necessary and/or appropriate. Approval of any amendments to the plan will be generated by staff and presented to the INRCOG Executive Committee or Board for review and consideration. The Executive Committee or Board may adopt the recommended amendments as presented or alter them as is appropriate. Passage of amendments shall be by a simple majority vote of the Executive Committee or Board of Directors.

VIII. Evaluation and Reporting

The INRCOG Board and/or Executive Committee will review progress annually. An annual evaluation of the plan will occur, with updates incorporated into subsequent staffing programs and budget cycles.

IX. Appendices

Appendix A: Workforce Demographic Snapshot
Appendix B: Critical Position Profiles
Appendix C: Staff Development Framework
Appendix D: Member Government Feedback Summary
Appendix E: Implementation Timeline Chart