



NORTH DAKOTA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SERVICE: 1976-2026

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Contact: Steve Lipp, President & CEO
701-222-8349, Steve@NDCF.net

North Dakota Community Foundation Celebrates 50 Years of Philanthropy

Bismarck, North Dakota . . . The North Dakota Community Foundation (NDCF) is celebrating 50 years of service to the citizens of North Dakota in 2026. The nonprofit organization has made more than \$134 million in grants to projects and programs in communities across the state since its inception.

“The impact of this organization has been incredible,” said Steve Lipp, President & CEO of NDCF. “We work with more than 500 volunteers annually and have more than 18,000 donors – this is truly the people of North Dakota’s foundation.”

The vast majority of NDCF’s almost \$190 million in assets are permanently endowed, meaning they will generate grant dollars forever for the community, organization, school, or scholarship fund they were intended to support.

The organization’s mission is to improve the quality of life for North Dakota citizens through charitable giving and promoting philanthropy. It was the first statewide community foundation in the nation and its structure was replicated in later years by several other rural states including Nebraska, Montana, and South Dakota.

Responding to a Need

The idea of a statewide community foundation surfaced at a meeting of North Dakota bankers back in the 1970s. The group all noticed the same thing happening in their communities – charitable dollars were leaving for a variety of reasons and there was no mechanism for their residents to give back locally. Most community foundations at that time were local. However, the work involved in setting up a 501(c)3 would be onerous for many rural communities.

A study funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation (now the Otto Bremer Trust) indicated that a statewide community foundation could be successful. An initial steering committee was formed and a Certificate of Incorporation was issued by the State of North Dakota on June 30, 1976.

The initial 13-member volunteer Board of Directors included some of the major leaders in communities from across the state including Thomas Clifford (President of the University of North Dakota), Judge Ralph Erickstad of Bismarck, Richard McKnight of Fargo, T.A. Roney of Carrington, Claude Zweber of Rugby, and M. Rosalie Lier of Fargo. T. A. Solheim of Minot served as the first Board Chair. NDCF

continues to be governed by a volunteer board composed of men and women from a variety of occupations and geographically dispersed across the state.

“We received significant support from a number of other organizations in our early years, including the ND Bremer Banks, the Otto Bremer Foundation, The Northwest Bancorporation (now Wells Fargo) and others ” noted C.J. Hager of Jamestown, the current NDCF Board Chair. “That early support was crucial, since the idea of a community foundation was relatively new for North Dakota and fundraising in the 1980s economy was difficult.”

Former North Dakota Governor William Guy served as the first Executive Director for the fledgling organization and initially worked out of his home office in Casselton. He began an organized pilgrimage across the state, meeting with bankers, lawyers, trust officers, and community leaders to promote the concept of the foundation and raise funds.

When Guy took a job at another organization in 1979, the NDCF Board of Directors hired Dr. Richard Timmins, former president of Huron College in Huron, South Dakota. The decision was made at that time to move the organization’s headquarters to Bismarck to be more centrally located.

Kevin Dvorak was hired as a Program Officer in 1989 and was named President & CEO in 1995, serving in that capacity for the next 30 years as the organization grew substantially. Lipp took over the leadership role on January 1, 2026.

Statewide and Local

NDCF’s signature program is local community endowment funds – permanent funds that support a specific community, county, or area. The first community endowment funds were established in 1981 in Bremer Bank communities. The program has expanded over the years and now includes 72 community funds. Last year, NDCF’s community endowment funds awarded more than \$3 million in grants to projects and programs in their specific area.

Advisory committees, made up of 5-9 local residents, lead fundraising efforts for their community fund and recommend grant awards every year. This “bottom up” approach to philanthropy is a cornerstone of NDCF operations – the belief that local residents know the needs of their area better than anyone else and should be fundamentally involved in the raising and distributing of their grant dollars.

“The North Dakota Community Foundation means longevity and support to Carrington,” Linda Schuster, longtime Advisory Committee member to the Carrington Community Endowment Fund said in 2016. “We’ve got professionals who look out for the funds that we’ve entrusted to them. People make a donation to the fund and it multiplies over and over again. That money goes back into the community. It helps provide more services that we need.”

Many Ways to Serve

NDCF currently manages more than 1,000 charitable funds, including donor-advised funds, scholarships, organizational endowment funds, and disaster response funds.

“One of the times that was very traumatic but where we were most useful to the citizens of North Dakota was the flood of 1997,” said Dvorak. “The governor’s office called and asked us to manage the private charitable donations to support those affected by the flood. We raised over \$23 million in just a few months. At that time we had a staff of two, but we had literally hundreds of volunteers that helped us in that effort.”

NDCF continues to open disaster response funds when requested and continues to waive its fees to ensure that 100% of donated dollars go to those impacted by the event.

The organization also manages more than 200 scholarship funds across the state and awarded \$817,000 in 400 scholarships in 2025.

Serving the Nonprofit Sector

A leader in the North Dakota nonprofit sector, NDCF has offered technical assistance and training to nonprofit organizations for decades. The North Dakota Association of Nonprofit Organizations (NDANO) was originally established under NDCF's umbrella in 1997 to give a voice to the many nonprofit entities in the state and continues to help educate, advocate, and connect nonprofits. NDCF has maintained continuous membership in NDANO and has been a major sponsor of its annual conference for many years.

NDCF leadership was also instrumental in drafting, vetting, and presenting legislation regarding the 40% state tax credit for gifts to qualified North Dakota endowment funds. The legislation was passed unanimously by both houses and signed into law by then-Governor John Hoeven. A later amendment in 2011 also passed unanimously in both houses.

"Charitable dollars were leaving the state," explained Dvorak, who served on NDANO's Public Policy Committee at that time. "It was important to give residents an incentive to keep those dollars in North Dakota, where they could improve the lives of fellow citizens."

Growth and Continued Service

What started as a simple idea to encourage and enable philanthropy in the state has grown. The organization that began operations in William Guy's home now has offices in Bismarck, Dickinson, Larimore, and Wahpeton, North Dakota. The staff has grown from two to 11 employees. Accounting that used to be done on a paper ledger now uses a sophisticated software system.

But despite the changes, the core of their work remains the same.

"We continue to connect donors with projects and programs in our communities and state that need funding," noted Lipp. "No matter how someone wants to give or what or where, we can help them accomplish their charitable-giving wishes. We encourage everyone to give where they live and leave a legacy for the future of North Dakota."

A condensed timeline of NDCF's history can be found at www.NDCF.net/Learn/History.html. For more information about establishing or contributing to a fund at NDCF, call 701-222-8349.

###

Caption for map: The North Dakota Community Foundation promotes place-based philanthropy and manages 72 community endowment funds across the state to help residents give back in their own communities.

Captions for photos:



Former North Dakota Governor William Guy was the first Executive Director for the North Dakota Community Foundation and worked out of his home office in Casselton.



NDCF raised and granted out more than \$23 million in donations during the Red River Flood of 1997, with the help of hundreds of volunteers and donations from several major companies to cover the costs of installing eight additional phone lines. In this photo volunteers Karen Beggenstass and Ilene Larson take credit card donations from generous donors. Because this catastrophic event received national and international attention, donations came from all 50

states and several countries.



NDCF has awarded more than \$134 million in grants since its inception. Here NDCF Board Member Lynn Nelson presents a grant check to Berlin, ND, mayor Darryl Ellingson for their city park playground project in 2001.



Governor John Hoeven signs the bill giving a 40% tax credit for gifts to qualified North Dakota endowment funds. Kevin Dvorak, third from left in the back row, was then-President & CEO of NDCF and instrumental in the bill's drafting, vetting, and presentation to the legislature.



Community of Care received a grant from NDCF in 2016 from the Clarence Johnson & Eunice Iwen Community Endowment Fund for their Faith Community Nurse program, with a goal of keeping seniors healthy and in their homes and communities as long as possible.



NDCF President & CEO Steve Lipp and Board Chair C. J. Hager present a \$75,000 grant check to representatives of the Anne Carlsen Center in 2025 from NDCF's Otto Bremer Trust Community Responsive Fund.