

# 2021

## Annual Report





# MNRAAA's Strategic Plan

In 2021, the Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging (MNRAAA), with the assistance of Strategic Consulting and Coaching (SCC), completed a strategic planning process. The process entailed an environmental scan, numerous focus groups, and meeting with different stakeholders. Once the information was compiled, SCC met with MNRAAA staff to set goals for the next three to five years. The five areas that MNRAAA will be targeting during that time are:

- Grow the aging network by expanding opportunities
- Prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion to strive for equitable access
- Expanding partnerships through collaborative outreach
- Utilize MNRAAA capacity
- Enhance the visibility of MNRAAA

Over the next few months and years, MNRAAA's board members and staff will be taking steps to accomplish these goals, which we will share in our future newsletters.

During the strategic planning process, we reviewed our vision and mission statements. Our vision statement was updated and now reads; **To Assist Older Adults to Thrive**. MNRAAA's mission statement has remained the same; **The Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging provides advocacy, information, resources and assistance so that older adults can maintain the lifestyle of their choice**. The vision and mission statements is what we do at MNRAAA.

Finally, MNRAAA staff has adopted five core values. The core values explain who we are as staff, board, and volunteers of MNRAAA. The core values are:

- **Stewardship:** We honor and protect resources to provide efficient and effective service to others.
- **Leadership:** We serve and strengthen the aging network by responding to a changing landscape.
- **Inclusion:** We value and elevate the perspectives of aging Minnesotans of all backgrounds and abilities.
- **Integrity:** We uphold our mission through respectful, honest, and transparent service to our community.
- **Dependability:** We are committed to being a trusted resource and partner in our community.

Look for us in your community as we work together to assist older adults to thrive.



Sincerely,  
**Jason W. Swanson, HSE**  
*Executive Director*



**Minnesota River Area  
Agency on Aging  
(MNRAAA)**

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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
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Rosie Dehli, *Montevideo*

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Candace Fenske, *Madelia*

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**Executive Director**

Jason W. Swanson, HSE

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Provided, in part, through Older Americans Act  
funding from the Minnesota Board on Aging.

# 2021 Financial Summary\*

## Support and Revenue

Federal Revenue	\$ 4,741,429
State Revenue	\$ 2,685,852
Foundation Grants	\$ 172,038
Other Revenue	\$ 69,870
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 7,669,189</b>

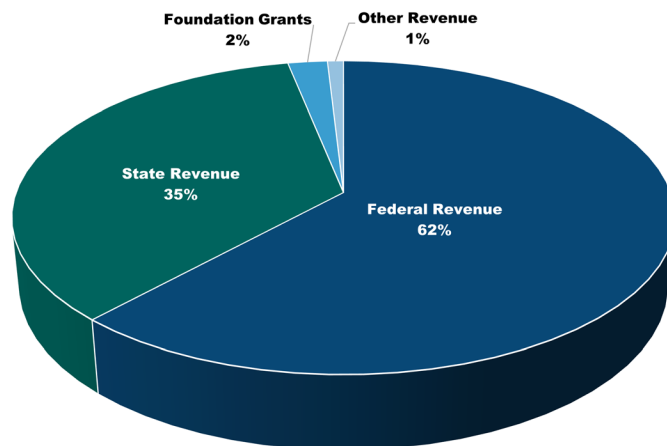
## Expenses

Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$ 2,562,811
Grantee and Contract Awards	\$ 3,651,310
Contract Management	\$ 757,737
Operational	\$ 640,172
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 7,612,030</b>

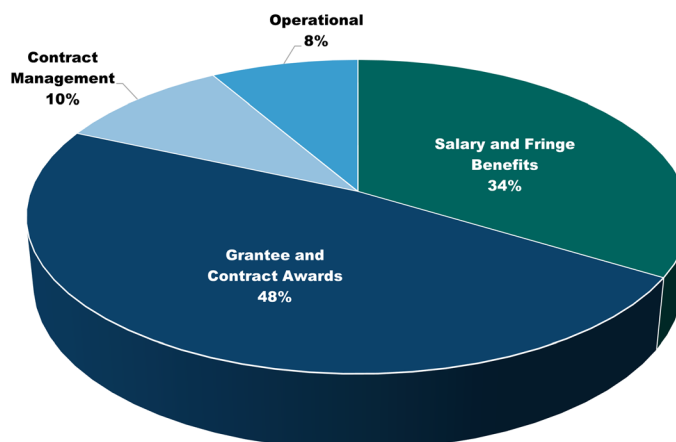
## Revenue over Expenses

**\$ 57,159**

\*unaudited totals



**2021 Revenue: \$7,669,189**



**2021 Expenses: \$7,612,030**

# CARES Act Funding

In 2021 MNRAAA received Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES Act) funding through the Administration for Community Living and the Minnesota Board on Aging. Our Program Development team worked to recruit and provide technical assistance to new applicants. MNRAAA awarded 22 organizations a total of \$467,597, targeting these dollars on providers serving rural areas and areas with the greatest social need, especially older adults facing social isolation, and communities where there are gaps in services.

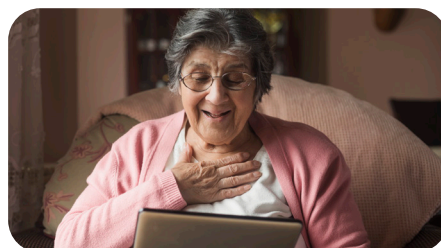
The CARES grants were designed to enable community-based organizations to provide support services, including chore service, homemaker service, visiting, telephone reassurance, and caregiver support. These funds are designated to address the service needs of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizations awarded include Appleton Area Health Services, Big Stone County Memory Loss Connection, Blue Earth County Library System, City of Adrian, City of Kerkhoven, Countryside Public Health, CREST, Essential Senior Services, Horn of Africa Aid and Rehabilitation Action Network, Interfaith Caregivers, Kyle's Small Engine Repair, Lac qui Parle Computer Commuter, Marshall Area Senior Citizens, Inc., Open Door Health Center, Pipestone County, Prairie Five

Community Action Council, Prairie Perspectives, Renville Health Services, Southern Minnesota Music Therapy, Waseca Area Caregiver Services and Woodland Centers.

The services provided through this funding ranged from training and education to build the capacity of immigrant family caregivers in Nicollet County by the Horn of Africa Aid and Rehabilitation Action Network, to 24/7 telephone accessibility by the Pipestone County Home Health program in support of older adults experiencing COVID. We received positive feedback from the grantees on how the new services improved older adults' lives, especially regarding how new technology allowed more freedom and provided new entertainment and learning experiences.

Over 4,150 older adults and caregivers were served through these CARES Act grant-funded programs! Consumers might be counted more than once if they participated in more than one CARES Act service. MNRAAA is honored to partner with so many dedicated community organizations across our region to deliver these essential services for older adults and caregivers.



## CAPABLE Program Expansion

In partnership with Allina Health – Home Health and Habitat for Humanity, MNRAAA expanded the CAPABLE program in 2021.

CAPABLE helps older adults by teaming a nurse, an occupational therapist, and a handy worker to address the home environment and assist the older adult in setting goals to improve safety and independence. The program also provides minor home modifications. Our goal is to support seniors in our community to safely age in place at home.

Participant criteria:

- 65 years and older
- own their home and live in Brown, Nicollet, Watonwan, eastern Redwood, or southern Sibley counties
- cannot afford home modifications
- cognitively intact or have only mild cognitive impairment to be able to help brainstorming and action planning process
- difficulty in performing Activities of Daily Living

This project is funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services Live Well at Home Grant.

To learn more, go to [mnraaa.org/capable-program](https://mnraaa.org/capable-program).

# Creative Ways to Address Social Isolation in Older Adults

The impact of social isolation and loneliness in older adults has become a more predominant concern for communities as healthcare professionals, public health experts, and researchers continue to learn about the negative impact of social isolation on older adults' physical, mental, and cognitive well-being.

Older adults are at higher risk for social isolation and loneliness due to changes in health and mobility that can limit social interactions. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue as people have had to stay at home and practice social distancing, limiting opportunities for social interaction. Home and community-based organizations have had to find creative strategies to address this challenge quickly.

Through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES Act) and Older Americans Act Title III funding, MNRAAA funded providers implementing creative adaptations of service delivery to provide an opportunity for social connection. Here are some strategies they used:

- One-on-one phone calls to individuals who had previously received in-person services. Not surprisingly, these contacts were typically lengthy and revealed which recipients were in special need of

support given the heightened and ongoing isolation as well as the increased challenges caregivers experienced.

- Outdoor gatherings for continued in-person support that allowed for physical distancing. Although the weather was a challenge for outdoor service delivery, one provider met in a garage space during poor weather.
- Transitioning services to a virtual platform. This change required a fast and furious learning curve for the providers and the participants. Individuals who could not use computer technology had the option to participate via telephone.
- Distributing activity kits to isolated older adults and caregivers. These kits included various items from word finds and note

cards with stamps to hand sanitizer and toilet paper. Providers distributed kits directly to recipients' homes following a telephone call to confirm receipt. Recipients expressed gratitude for the kits and for being remembered and their circumstances acknowledged.

Much has been learned throughout this pandemic experience. MNRAAA's goal is continued support for the development of innovative service delivery for older adults, emphasizing social connectedness for health and well-being.

To read more on how you can overcome social isolation during another covid winter, see AARP's article on this topic: [www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2021/social-isolation-pandemic-winter.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2021/social-isolation-pandemic-winter.html).





# 2021 Employee Recognition Award

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Anne M. Mulchay once said, "Employees are a company's greatest asset - they're your competitive advantage."

An opportunity presented itself after completing our strategic planning and defining our five core values. MNRAAA implemented an Employee Recognition Award to recognize staff who uphold MNRAAA's core values: Stewardship, Leadership, Inclusion, Integrity, and Dependability. This gave staff the ability to nominate their co-workers for upholding and embracing the core values. Three times a year, one staff member will be presented with an Employee Recognition Award.



*Alison Wierschke*

In December, Alison Wierschke was presented with MNRAAA's first Employee Recognition Award. Nominations for Alison cited her ability to be a resource to her Return to Community teammates and other Area

Agency on Aging offices with a calm, professional demeanor. Alison embodies the dedication, excellence, and service that has fostered a positive reputation for the Senior LinkAge Line.

Alison joined MNRAAA in March 2019 as a Return to Community Specialist. She lives in North Mankato with her husband and daughters. She also enjoys playing the piano and singing. You can find her and her family active in the community or out on walks when not working.

Congratulations Alison and thank you for your hard work and dedication to assisting older adults thrive!

## MNRAAA Board of Directors

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MNRAAA announces that Candace Fenske, a former Hospital Administrator at Madelia Community Hospital, has fulfilled her term as a member of the Board of Directors for MNRAAA. During her six years on the Board, Fenske has served as the Finance Committee Chair and Treasurer.

"Fenske is a strong advocate for older adults in rural Minnesota, and her passion continues to inspire," remarked Robert Roesler, MNRAAA's Board Chair.



***Continued on page 7.***

*Left to right: Jason W. Swanson, Candace Fenske and Bob Roesler*

# Board Chair's Report

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*Board Chair Bob Roesler*

## **Social Isolation**

The pandemic dominated the narrative once again in 2021. This time last year, we anticipated getting back to more in-person meetings and events. However, the virtual world continues to be the host site of these gatherings. This works well for business meetings and occasional face-to-face time with friends and family.

Human beings are social by nature and need to be active. Numerous studies are coming out around this subject and have given tips to stay engaged. A few include scheduling regular in-person visits with neighbors who may not have a support system nearby, joining an online or in-person support group or organization that focuses on shared interests,

and staying current with your medical provider.

We continue to look forward to the day when a handshake brings joy without hesitation about reciprocating the gesture.

## **A Look Back**

As we waved goodbye to the year 2021, we could not deny the numerous similarities to 2020, like facemasks, restrictions, vaccines, and so forth. To some, it may sound like 2021 was bleak, but I remember the great strides our organization has shown over the previous year.

MNRAAA was able to expand services in our area through additional funding successfully. That funding allowed us to serve more older adults in need. We saw great investments made by the state legislature

for volunteer drivers and broadband across the state. Finally, our agency continued to have staff work remotely from their homes while continuing to provide outstanding service to older adults and caregivers.

After nearly a year and a half without seeing each other in person, we were able to host a much-needed in-person staff retreat in August. Of course, the turnout was fantastic. I'm not sure if that was due to the location, a local winery, or the opportunity for face-to-face interactions. Regardless, it was a wonderful time to be together. MNRAAA rounded out the year with additional in-person meetings, strategic planning sessions, and setting our sights on a rewarding year ahead, no matter what it may look like.



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## ***MNRAAA Board of Directors continued from page 6.***

During her tenure on the Board of Directors, Fenske was instrumental in guiding the organization in becoming an

independent non-profit agency encompassing twenty-seven counties in the Southwest Planning and Service Area.

Fenske also assisted during the transition to a new Executive Director in 2019.



# Staff Retreat



*Photos from the MNRAAA Staff Retreat*

In August, MNRAAA staff and board members were able to get together for a staff retreat. The retreat was held at Painted Prairie Vineyards in Dovray, MN. With the picture-perfect weather, we held the retreat outside to accommodate guidelines.

This retreat provided an opportunity for staff and board members to meet each other for the first time. Kit Welchlin presented on Communication, Emotional Intelligence, and Dealing with Stress. Kit's presentation provided a lot of well-needed laughter as well as professional and personal takeaways. Cory Becker, a staff person from Congresswoman Michelle Fischbach's office, provided an update on what was happening in Washington D.C. This was followed by Dr. Andrew Kopperud of Sanford-Westbrook, who gave an update on COVID-19.

At the end of the retreat, Dr. Kopperud and his wife Krista (proprietors of Painted Prairie Vineyards) gave tours and talked about their winery with staff and board members.



# Another Successful Medicare Open Enrollment

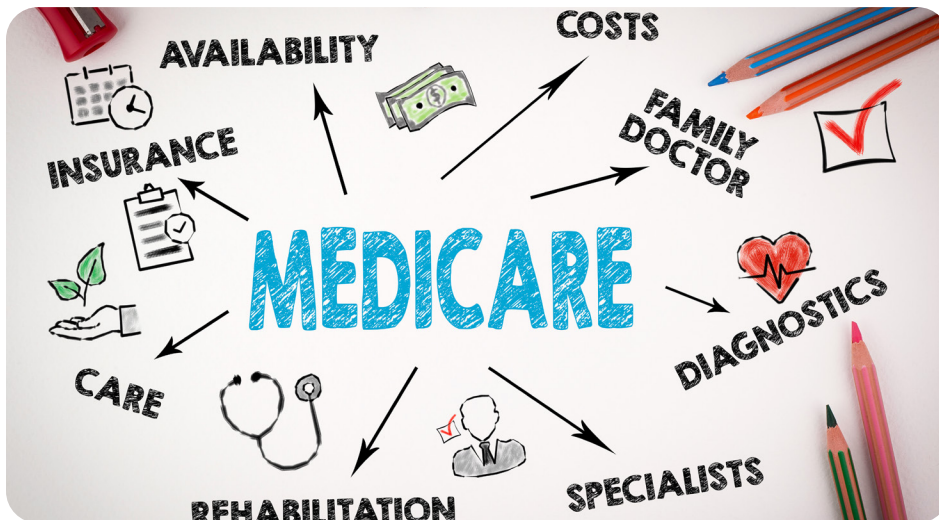
The 2022 Medicare Open Enrollment Period (OEP) began October 15 and ended December 7. During this period, Senior LinkAge Line® staff across the state were busy helping people on Medicare review their plan options for the coming year. Several Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging (MNRAAA) Senior LinkAge Line staff have been helping people with their Medicare research since the first OEP back in 2006. Each commented

that this year's OEP was the smoothest in recent memory.

Why might that be? Well, MNRAAA is fortunate to have a number of staff who are highly skilled and experienced. We also do a great deal of advance preparation so that once October 15 comes, staff are ready to "hit the ground running." During extremely busy times, MNRAAA supervisors also take calls. This year, hold times were rarely over 30 minutes, which is extraordinary,

given the high call volume and complex calls.

On January 1, the Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period began. This OEP runs through March 31 and gives people on a Medicare Advantage Plan a second opportunity to review their plan benefits and make a change. People who have a Medicare Advantage Plan on January 1 can make a one-time change to a different Advantage Plan, or they can return to Original Medicare.



**m MINNESOTA**  
SENIOR LINKAGE LINE

If you have a question about Medicare, call the Senior LinkAge Line at 800-333-2433. Trained specialists are available to answer your questions Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. The Senior LinkAge Line is a program of the Minnesota Board on Aging and Minnesota's area agencies on aging.

## Slayton Office Closure

In the spring of 2020, MNRAAA temporarily closed our offices in Mankato and Slayton, pivoting all staff to working from home while continuing to provide services for older adults and caregivers during the pandemic.

In 2021, MNRAAA made the difficult decision to permanently close our Slayton office location. While the physical office has

closed in Slayton, MNRAAA was able to maintain all staff by allowing them to work remotely. MNRAAA will continue to offer classes and presentations virtually.

Although the MNRAAA sign on the building has been taken down from the Slayton office, it does not mean that our presence is gone. Just the opposite,

MNRAAA is working hard to ensure that we represent and assist all of the communities in our service area. Our staff, volunteers, board members, and community partners want to be available to you.

You can continue to reach MNRAAA online at [www.MNRAAA.org](http://www.MNRAAA.org) or on Facebook at [facebook.com/MNRAAA](https://facebook.com/MNRAAA).

# Senior LinkAge Line Virtual Outreach

The pandemic has caused everyone to become more creative and flexible in how they do business. Previously, most of the outreach for the Senior LinkAge Line® was conducted in-person by staff and volunteers. After March of 2020 for the safety of the people we serve and the staff, it was necessary to pull back from in-person assistance and find another way to reach people who needed help. In person assistance and outreach were very limited; typically, we conducted outreach virtually. This included online presentations for people wanting Medicare information,

for providers who wanted to know more about preadmission screening, for older adults and caregivers wanting to learn how to plan and pay for their long-term care and lastly for people who wanted to learn more about the Senior LinkAge Line.

To everyone's surprise, these online meetings have been working really well. Plans are underway to expand virtual presentations in 2022. Additional presentation topics will include, preventing fraud and caregiver support. We have found that doing presentations virtually allow people to learn from the comfort of their home or office, require less time for

participants and allow our staff to be more productive.



## SENIOR LINKAGE LINE

If you are interested in attending a virtual presentation, or your organization is interested in hosting, contact the Senior LinkAge Line at 800-333-2433. The Senior LinkAge Line is a program of the Minnesota Board on Aging and Minnesota's area agencies on aging.



## Care for Caregivers



MNRAAA partnered with Pioneer PBS to host Care for Caregivers on October 13, 2021 to virtually screen Caregiver: A Love Story and provide conversation and resources for rural caregivers. Speakers included PBS host and founder of the nonprofit End in Mind, Cathy Wurzer and Oscar-nominated filmmaker, Dr. Jessica Zitter. Additional partners for this event included Southwest Initiative Foundation, End in Mind, Do No Harm Media, The Remember Project, the Granite Falls Living at Home/ Block Nurse Program and Prairie Five Community Action Council Inc.



# Feedback from Senior LinkAge Line® Callers



The Community Living Specialist and county worker are angels and they performed a miracle.

*You have made my day, week...year!!!!  
Thank you so much for all of your help  
finding assistance to help me pay for  
my medications.*

I am overwhelmed by how helpful and invaluable the Senior LinkAge Line is and your service is a true blessing.

*The Community Living Specialist has been instrumental in me being able to have my husband home. They helped me get help in our home so I can spend some time just loving him instead of always being his caregiver. She is tremendous at her job, and I don't know what I would have done without her.*

I am so grateful for the assistance and for someone who listened.

*I felt more comfortable having someone from the Senior LinkAge Line on the phone to advocate for me with my insurance company and I appreciate the help.*

I am feeling more empowered, relieved, and comforted knowing that at least I have someone to call and talk to now.

*The Senior LinkAge Line helped me connect with transportation services while I was recovering from a fall. I am now a volunteer driver to help others.*

My spouse has dementia and you have been my saving grace and I thank you for helping me find resources.

*As a caregiver, the Senior LinkAge Line is the light at the end of my tunnel.*

Thank you for the follow-up calls. During every call, the specialist gives me ideas that allow me to better care for my father.

*I attended a New to Medicare class and stayed after to express my gratitude for the Senior LinkAge Line's free service. I learned a wealth of information from this class.*

I am very grateful for the assistance as I did not know where to turn.

*You make magic happen!*

I had a very good experience and was thrilled to hear of all the additional services that the Senior LinkAge Line provides that I was not aware of.

*\*Some comments were edited for content and to fit space available.*



Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging®

201 N. Broad St., Suite 102  
Mankato, MN 56001



## Over 23,863 Older Adults and Caregivers Supported in 2021

Numbers represent older adults and caregivers in the Southwest Planning and Service Area.  
Consumers may be counted more than once if they participated in more than one service.

**13,415**

Consumers served  
via the Senior  
LinkAge Line®.

**2,201**

Older adults received  
43,672 congregate  
meals.

**6,990**

Older adults received  
407,772 home-  
delivered meals.

**360**

Older adults received  
1,737 hours of legal  
assistance.

**38**

Caregivers received  
1,513 hours of  
respite care.

**205**

Caregivers  
participated in 3,352  
sessions of caregiver  
support services.

**176**

Older adults  
participated in  
evidence-based  
health promotion  
programs.

**148**

Older adults received  
3,064 hours of chore  
and homemaker  
services.

**304**

Older adults received  
8,407 one-way  
transportation  
& assisted  
transportation rides.

**26**

Elders from diverse  
cultures received  
1,168 hours of  
individual special  
access services.