

**DATE:** March 6, 2026

**TO:** Ramsey County City Administrators and Community Development Directors

**FROM:** Josh Olson, Director, Community & Economic Development Department

**CC:** Ling Becker, County Manager

Kari Collins, Deputy County Manager, Economic Growth & Community Investment

**RE: Ramsey County EDA Implementation Next Steps**

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Thank you for your ongoing support of the Ramsey County's housing and redevelopment programming. I look forward to the continued partnership in ensuring all in Ramsey County are valued and thrive.

I am reaching out to provide you with information regarding the next steps to enhancing programming for entrepreneurs and small businesses as result of last year's approved 'EDA Bill.' On December 2nd, 2025, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners took an initial step to formally create the Ramsey County Economic Development Authority. This was a required first step, prior to the beginning of this year's legislative session, but it is the first of many steps required to allow enhanced business programming to be funded through the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority levy.

While the legislation allowed for the creation of the Ramsey County Economic Development Authority (EDA), it outlined two important conditions:

1. **The EDA will have no taxing authority.** This was intentional as the EDA will only receive and spend funding from the existing Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) levy. Expansion of the HRA to include EDA powers, as described by state statute, allows the county to utilize a portion of HRA levy funding for purposes of small business support and enhanced business programming.
2. **Each City is required to 'Opt In' to this enhanced business programming.**

### **'Opt-In' Process**

The process for a City to Opt-in requires a city resolution by June 1, 2026. Receipt of approved resolutions from cities will create a map that shows the EDA's Area of Operation. Ramsey County would then establish the EDA Area of Operation on or by June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Enhanced business programming will begin January 1, 2027. A draft resolution for city council approval is provided below.

### **Tentative Programming**

Tentative plans continue to plan for an allocation of \$1.5 - \$2 million yearly from the existing Housing and Redevelopment Authority levy towards business focused programming. Programming and total budget allocation have not yet been formalized as the County awaits

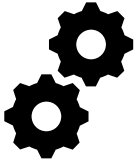
final decisions from cities regarding their intent to opt-in. While the approved EDA's Area of Operation is a critical consideration to determining the scale and scope of final programming, we have identified five core focus areas for enhanced business support and growth programming. These areas include (further details below):

- Improve the capacity of Business Support Organizations
- Expand technical assistance service offerings to businesses
- Create new cohort-based learning opportunities
- Establish data gathering, research & reporting capabilities
- Provide direct support to projects and businesses that deliver business growth

Please note: The County's existing portfolio of business programming (Open to Business, CEO Next, CEO Now, and RamseyCountyMeansBusiness.com) remains unchanged for this year.

Please reach out if you would like to further discuss this process and/or tentative programming, including any additional questions. Lastly, while it is not expected, if you are able to communicate your council's intentions ahead of the June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline that would be appreciated.

## Proposed Core Programmatic Areas for Enhanced Business Programming



### Improve the Capacity of Business Support Organizations

Business Support Organizations (BCOs) are important lifelines to entrepreneurs and small businesses. In many instances BCOs are a first stop of businesses looking to get a business started, navigate regulatory and technical hurdles, and seek financing. As the County, we saw first-hand during recent crises and business interruptions that our BCOs require resources to effectively and proactively respond. The ongoing ***Business Reimagination Center*** initiative is piloting efforts in 2026 that support capacity of BCOs. This piloted effort will inform future programming.

**High Level Budget Estimate: \$250,000**



### Expand Technical Assistance Service Offerings to Businesses

Small businesses often seek a myriad of technical assistance services in order for them to grow and prosper. The County currently invests in the Open to Business program that offers no cost direct technical assistance and other forms of support to small business owners and entrepreneurs. Enhanced technical services support general business challenges like accounting, marketing, digital literacy and/or could support business sectors. The ongoing ***Business Reimagination Center*** initiative is also piloting new and enhanced technical services that will inform future programming.

**High Level Budget Estimate: \$250,000**



### Create New Cohort-Based Learning Opportunities

Cohort-based learning programs like CEO Next and CEO Now allow business leaders to learn with and alongside their peers. CEO Next and CEO Now are a regional partnership with Hennepin County. Hennepin County currently operates these programs. Ramsey County is exploring possibilities for Ramsey County only cohorts as well as cohorts serving business at different growth stages.

**High Level Budget Estimate: \$250,000**



### Establish Data Gathering, Research & Reporting Capabilities

Data is everywhere, and it is increasingly playing a role in business growth and innovation. Decision making driven by robust data can create transformational impacts in assisting businesses in their growth, as well as support more robust and coordinated business retention, expansion and attraction efforts by the county and cities.

**High Level Budget Estimate: \$250,000**



### Provide Direct Support to Projects and Businesses That Deliver Business Growth

Accelerate business growth by providing direct, targeted support to projects and businesses with strong economic potential through mechanisms such as grants, low-interest loans, etc.

**High Level Budget Estimate: \$1,000,000**