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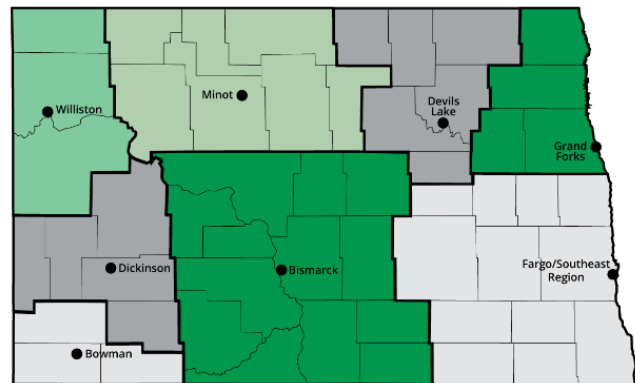
HB 1191

JANUARY 27, 2025

Chairman Warrey and members of the Committee:

I am fortunate to serve as the State Director of the North Dakota Small Business Development Centers (ND SBDC). We are the state's largest and most impactful entrepreneur and small business development program. Our team of credentialed advisors serves small business owners and entrepreneurs across the state, in any industry and with any business project. We provide expertise, insights, and leverage resources to ensure client success, resulting in economic impacts that strengthen local communities. All services are confidential and provided at no cost to the client (federally mandated).

Since its inception in 1986, the *nationally accredited* North Dakota Small Business Development Centers program continues to be a model for successful public-private partnerships. Nationally, the SBDC program is administered and funded at the federal level by the U.S. Small Business Administration and at the local level by the Bank of North Dakota and community investors. We serve our state from eight physical locations, as shown.



Since the start of the 2023-2025 state biennium, our efforts to diversify our state and local economies served clients from each of the 53 counties in North Dakota. We served more than 3,100 unique individuals with business advising and training workshops. From these clients, 216 new business starts were reported to us, and 9,216 jobs were supported by our work with these businesses. Through the direct assistance of our business advisors, **our clients reported more than \$90 million in capital investment** – fueling small business creation, expansion, and success. These aren't just numbers, they represent real opportunities for families, the foundation for generational wealth, stronger communities, and a more resilient North Dakota economy.

The ND SBDC is a crucial resource for businesses, state agencies, and program partners across the state, providing guidance, support, and innovative solutions that enable entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive in our communities. We are a key leader of the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Our partnerships are wide and deep, and we are intentional about providing all our clients with connections to only quality resources and at the right time in their journey.

I am also grateful to wear the "hat" of the ND APEX Accelerator Project Director, alongside my Program Manager, David Kleppe. The ND APEX Accelerator (formerly known as the Procurement Technical Assistance Center), is federally funded by the Department of Defense, and was historically funded at the state level by the ND Department of Commerce. This program's mission is to expand the number of businesses capable of participating in government contracts. Offerings focus on building a strong, sustainable, and resilient U.S. supply chain by assisting a wide range of businesses that pursue and perform under contracts with the DoD, other federal agencies, state and local governments, and with government prime contractors. APEX

Accelerators work with partners to provide the opportunity for companies new to government contracting to acquire the skills and know-how to compete in the government marketplace.

APEX Accelerators provide a critical entry point for industry and is another vital partner in our state's entrepreneur ecosystem. This direct support to North Dakota businesses results in diversification of revenue streams and real job creation in our communities. *Federal, state, and local governments reap the reward of having strong suppliers to keep costs down, and specifically for state and local governments, to keep dollars in their own local economy.* North Dakota's investment in this program is very small, measured against its economic impact. Since the beginning of the 2023-25 biennium, the ND APEX Accelerator has assisted nearly 600 small and large businesses in our state enter the government marketplace. **Many of these clients have been successful, having received more than \$736 million in government contracts.**

When we combine the capital investment amount and the annual sales of ND SBDC clients, and the contracts (federal, state, and local) awarded to businesses in North Dakota being supported by the ND APEX Accelerator program, our network's total economic impact in our state in 2024 was **over \$1.23 billion.**

North Dakota's entrepreneurial ecosystem is large and can be intimidating and confusing for entrepreneurs and small businesses. However, there has been considerable efforts expended at local levels, regionally, and with statewide partners, to clarify messaging, differentiate between service providers, and make the options easier to understand and connect with. We, and other resources, are aware of the challenges and we have taken on the task to ensure that solutions are found to meet the needs of the ecosystem and those looking for support. The strong connections in our ecosystem, the pro-business climate in our state, and the ease of access to these two programs through many "front-doors" makes the opportunity to start and grow a business possible in our state.

Our work has led to the realization of many dreams and provided individuals with the opportunity to achieve financial independence and better balance. Regardless of industry or interest, from manufacturing to childcare, innovation to rural vitality, and workforce development to business transition planning, we as a network of passionate and invested individuals look forward to leading the efforts in this state for years to come.

I appreciate having this opportunity to share this information with you. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Tiffany Ford
State Director, North Dakota Small Business Development Centers
Project Director, ND APEX Accelerator