

Returning to Our Roots: Introducing CEDA's Grant Retainer Program

In 1986 Minnesotans communicated via landlines and fax machines, the internet was years away, and Top Gun was the most popular movie in theaters. In the age of shoulder pads and leg warmers, CEDA was founded as a small grant-writing organization dedicated to helping rural communities access funding opportunities.

Forty years later, while much has changed, that mission remains the same.

To date, CEDA has helped communities across the Midwest secure more than \$100 million in funding to support infrastructure, housing, economic development, recreation, public safety, and countless other community projects.

As CEDA celebrates its 40th anniversary, we're returning to our roots with a **Grant Retainer Program**. A flexible service giving communities access to CEDA's grant writing expertise without the cost of an additional full-time staff member.

The goal isn't simply to write more grants—it's to ensure the community is ready when the right funding opportunity becomes available

The City of Cannon Falls is one of the newest communities to add this service, and has worked with the grants department using a flexible hourly mode. Rather than pursuing grants only when the opportunity arises, the Grant Retainer Program allows the City and the CEDA team a proactive approach to funding. Together, we develop a grant work plan that identifies priority projects, maps out anticipated funding opportunities, and helps budgets for the costs associated with pursuing those grants.

When a funding opportunity opens, especially one with a short application window, the groundwork has already been laid. This significantly reduces the time needed to develop and approve a grant proposal, allowing the community to respond quickly with a more competitive application. In just a short time, the City of Cannon Falls has been able to apply for new equipment for the fire department and EMS services, housing projects, and downtown revitalization projects while prioritizing key projects for the remainder of 2026 and into 2027.

Communities that partner with CEDA gain more than a grant writer, they gain the support of a team backed by the collective experience of more than 55 community and economic development professionals serving rural communities across Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. From identifying funding opportunities to writing competitive applications and administering awarded grants, CEDA provides the expertise and capacity needed to help communities move projects forward.

Interested in learning more? Contact grants@cedausa.com to discuss your community's priorities and reserve time on our 2027 calendar.