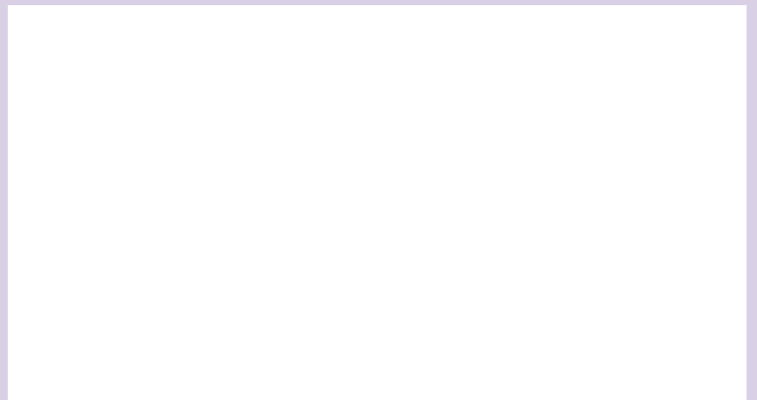


The Iowa County Magazine



August 2026

**ISAC Annual
Conference:
99 Grand Champions**



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GOT **5 YARDS OF ROCK** TO PUT IN 3 BEDS.
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The Iowa County

August 2026 * Volume 55, Number 7

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Iowa State Association of Counties
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ISAC's Mission:

To promote effective and responsible county government
for the people of Iowa.

ISAC's Vision:

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation,
information and services for and about county government
in Iowa.

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CONFERENCE AGENDA-AT-A-GLANCE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

1:00 pm - 6:00 pm
12:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Affiliate Committee Meetings
ISAC Legislative Policy Committee Meeting

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19

7:00 am - 8:00 am
8:30 am - 4:30 pm
8:00 am - 9:00 am
9:00 am - 11:00 am
11:00 am - 12:00 pm
12:00 pm - 1:30 pm
1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
2:30 pm - 4:00 pm

Affiliate Committee Meetings
ISAC Registration and Information Desk
Morning Refreshments (Pastries & Yogurt)
ISAC General Session
Lunch
ISAC Educational Seminars and Tracks
Break and Exhibitor Game
ISAC Educational Seminars and Tracks

THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

7:30 am - 5:00 pm
7:30 am - 8:30 am
8:30 am - 11:00 am
11:00 am - 12:30 am
12:30 pm - 5:00 pm
5:00 pm - 10:00 pm

ISAC Registration and Information Desk
Morning Refreshments (Breakfast Bowls)
Affiliate Time
Lunch and Vendor Prize Drawing
Affiliate Time
County Night at the State Fair

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21

7:30 am - 12:00 pm
7:30 am - 8:00 am
8:00 am - 12:00 pm

ISAC Registration and Information Desk
Morning Refreshments (Full Hot Breakfast)
Affiliate Time

AFFILIATE TIME MEETING ROOMS:

312-313 | Assessors
302-303 | Auditors
314 | Conservation
309-310 | Engineers
317 | Planning and Zoning
301 | Public Health
318-320 | Recorders
304-306 | Supervisors
315-316 | Treasurers

NOT MEETING:

Attorneys
Community Services
Emergency Management
Environmental Health
Information Technology
Sheriffs and Deputies
Veterans Service Officers





ISAC EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS AND TRACKS WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19

All educational seminars can be attended by any conference attendee at any time.

Professional and Personal Development Track

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Meeting Room 307-310

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm – Developing Growth Mindset

In this session, participants are introduced to Grow-and-Let-Go Strategies designed to help one manage stress and develop a growth mindset.

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm – Creating a Culture of Excellence and Civility

This interactive presentation will incorporate key strategies that will focus on how we each play a role in creating a culture of excellence and civility. Participants will engage with research-based strategies to enhance core leadership competencies that create a culture of excellence and civility that is motivated by relationship building, integrity, respect, clear communication of expectations, purposeful habits, pro-active mindset and accountability.

Local Government Track

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Meeting Room 302-305

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm – Making Local Government Cool Again

A panel discussion covering the current perception of local government in Iowa and ways that members can proactively begin to modernize and take ownership of the narrative locally and statewide.

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm – Collaboration Builds Stronger Counties

Small groups will be given the opportunity to engage in four rotating facilitated discussions. Cool counties are on the forefront of: 1. IT; 2. Legal and HR; 3. Benefits and Cost Savings; and 4. Public Communications and Government Relations. This session will allow for industry experts, ISAC staff, and colleague questions, input, and feedback on tools, best practices, available resources, and much more, to continue to position you, your county, and the 99 counties in Iowa as active and effective local government leaders.



Iowa State Fairgrounds | The Depot

5:00-10:00 PM | August 20, 2026

Join us on Thursday, August 20, for County Night at the Fair! Come connect and unwind at The Depot while enjoying a great night at the fair with colleagues and peers from across the state. This event is a great way to strengthen connections, celebrate the work happening across Iowa's counties, and enjoy some classic State Fair fun.

Your ticket includes a "Behind the 99" campaign t-shirt, along with drink and food tickets. A shuttle will run continuously from 4:30pm – 10:00pm between the Hilton Des Moines Downtown and the fairgrounds for your convenience. We hope to see you there!

Open Meetings and Open Records Law Update

On May 15, 2026, the Governor signed House File 2490 into law. The law took effect on July 1, 2026, and made three notable changes to Iowa Code chapters 21 and 22 that governmental bodies should be aware of when managing open meetings and open records requests.

Open Meetings Notice Requirement Changes

House File 2490 modified the requirements for providing notice for an open meeting. Under Iowa Code section 21.4, notice must now include all of the following:

1. Advising the news media who have filed a request for notice with the governmental body.
2. Posting the notice in a prominent and conspicuous place which is annually designated for such purposes by the governmental body, in a manner such that the notice is visible at all times.
3. Posting the notice on the primary internet site owned or maintained and regularly updated by the governmental body or other primary internet presence moderated by the governmental body, if applicable.



Beth Manley
ISAC General Counsel
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These changes require governmental bodies to annually designate a prominent and conspicuous place for meeting notices, ensure the notice is always visible, and post the notice on the governmental body's primary internet site or other primary internet presence moderated by the governmental body.

House File 2490 also added a new subparagraph allowing a previously posted agenda to be amended if the amended agenda is posted at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the commencement of the meeting, is marked with the word "AMENDED," and identifies the amended provisions. The governmental body must also provide notice of the amended agenda using the notice methods described above.

Open Record Requirement to Disclose Certain Employment Information

House File 2490 added two subparagraphs to Iowa Code section 22.7(11)(a) requiring government bodies to disclose the following employment information in response to a public records request:

1. The last date the individual, who resigned from or was discharged by the government body, performed work or actively carried out essential functions of the position, regardless of whether the information is contained in a written document, contract, agreement, or arrangement.
2. The amount of moneys and public benefits provided to the individual for any continuation of pay, severance, or other compensation or benefits in excess of the amounts owed for work performed by the individual prior to the individual's last day as an employee, contractor, or appointee for the government body, regardless of whether the information is contained in a written document, contract, agreement, or arrangement.

New Vexatious Requester Injunction

House File 2490 also created Iowa Code section 22.8A, which allows a district court to grant an injunction restraining a person found to be a vexatious requester from examining public records from a specific government body under section 22.2. The court may also impose reasonable limitations on the manner, frequency, or scope of the requester's public records requests.

Open Meetings and Open Records Law Update

To obtain an injunction, the government body has the burden to show all of the following:

1. The requests, considered in totality, would clearly not be in the public interest.
2. The requests, considered in totality, constitute a pattern of vexatious conduct.
3. The continuation of such requests would substantially and irreparably injure the government body's ability to perform the government body's duties or functions.
4. Less restrictive measures under this chapter are inadequate to provide sufficient relief.

Section 22.8A requires the court to take into account the policy of Iowa Code chapter 22 "that free and open examination of public records is generally in the public interest even though such requests may cause inconvenience or embarrassment to public officials or others." This section allows the court to consider any of the following when determining whether conduct constitutes vexatious conduct:

1. The number, frequency, timing, scope, and content of public requests.
2. The nature of oral and written communications related to the public requests.
3. Any prior administrative or judicial findings regarding the conduct of the requester.
4. All other relevant circumstances.

Section 22.8A defines "vexatious conduct" as a pattern of public records requests that satisfies one or more of the following: (a) the requests are designed primarily to harass the government body, its officers, or its employees; (b) the government body shows by clear and convincing evidence that the requests impose an unreasonable burden on the government body and compliance would substantially interfere with essential governmental operations; and/or (c) the requests are submitted in a manner or accompanied by communication that constitute harassment of public officers or employees as provided in section 718.4. The section further provides that "'vexatious conduct' does not include solely a large volume of requests made by a person or a representative of the news media."

Finally, if the court does not find that the requester engaged in a pattern of vexatious conduct, the government body that brought the action under this new section is required to pay all costs and reasonable attorney fees.

The full text of House File 2490 is available here: https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/LGE/91/Attachments/HF2490_GovLetter.pdf.

If you have questions, please contact Beth Manley at bmanley@iowacounties.org.

County Leadership Institute

If you get the chance, make it happen. Don't miss the opportunity. That's all you need to remember if you're asked to participate in NACO's County Leadership Institute (CLI). I've been to a lot of leadership trainings and classes over my 25 years in law enforcement and while they've all been valuable, CLI was the most meaningful.

Leadership is not a one and done endeavor or something you focus on to check a box and move on. It's a journey without an end and one we should all pursue if we want to provide the best service to those we serve and the leaders looking to take our place. Fortunately, countless authors, speakers, performers, and content creators have created more than enough material for anyone to consume and make a part of their venture. But all of these options are passive because you only have to give them your time and manage your ability to pay attention. The most meaningful part of the leadership journey is when you get out of your comfort zone and immerse yourself in the struggle with other people. And that's what makes CLI different.

When I said yes to going, I assumed it was going to be like most other leadership opportunities I've had along the way. It's all good stuff and you come back reinvigorated with fresh ideas to improve yourself and your agency, as well as more work for your command staff. These are good things. But I was completely wrong about what I would bring back. Instead of coming back with new ideas, I came back with clarity and resolve.

CLI puts 25 complete strangers from across the country in the same room for three days to show us that we're not all that special; we're just normal people trying to make the best decisions for the communities we love. That at the core of what we do is solve the same basic problems and the only difference is matter of scale. From the Rust Belt to the Continental Divide, county government is trying to tackle the issues that are personal to neighbors and have long term impacts. Criminal justice, wastewater, development, livestock: these problems hit close to home and evoke strong public sentiment from multiple sides. Local matters are rarely binary and often complicated.

I came back with a lot, but two things stand out. First, was the importance of staying connected to purpose. We must never forget why we do what we do, why we believe what we believe, and that purpose-driven leadership inspires calm and confidence. Commitment to purpose helps us follow through on our goals and keep our "say:do ratio" at a high level. Successful leaders need to have a long-game lens and purpose needs be at the front of the scope.

And then there's the importance of ego. All elected officials have an ego; that's part of the job description. But all too often our egos get in the way of progress or create barriers to compromise. They blur our vision and prevent us from listening, especially when the chips are down. It's so easy to make things about yourself and put your ego at the center of the table, and that's where we go wrong.

CLI steps in and reminds us to put the problem in the middle, not ourselves or our egos, because we aren't trying to fix ourselves and self-interest tends to make things worse. As elected officials, we often need to stop and remember to put the issue at the forefront, not our feelings. We weren't elected to make ourselves better, our job is to put the problem in the middle and work within our office to make decisions in the best interest of the people. That starts with taking a 30,000 foot view and getting people to agree on the problem before we get bogged down in possible solutions. Without a starting point, you'll never have direction.

NACO has a great thing going with CLI, and when you finish, you're part of a whole new family. If the offer comes your way, say yes and dive into it. Be vulnerable. You'll come out better on the other side.



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Data Centers Put County Zoning on the National Stage

When most people think about artificial intelligence, they picture software: a chatbot, a search engine, or a program that can produce an image in seconds. They probably do not picture a rezoning application, a groundwater study, a new electrical substation, or public meeting rooms filled to capacity with concerned residents.

But that is where the growth of artificial intelligence and cloud computing increasingly becomes real. The digital economy has a very physical footprint, and much of the responsibility for deciding where that footprint belongs falls on local governments.

Data centers have moved county zoning into the middle of a national discussion about economic development, energy, water, taxation, and infrastructure. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that data centers used about 4.4% of all electricity consumed in the United States in 2023. By 2028, that share could reach between 6.7% and 12%. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that 38 states offer dedicated data center tax incentives, even as lawmakers in a growing number of states consider temporary bans or moratoriums while they study the impacts.



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Iowa is not watching this trend from the sidelines. Google reports that it has invested more than \$20 billion in Iowa since opening its Council Bluffs data center in 2007, including a recently announced \$7 billion investment to expand in Council Bluffs and establish a new campus in the Cedar Rapids area. For Iowa counties, data centers are no longer a niche land-use issue. They are an emerging form of major infrastructure development tied in with broader societal conversations.

Not Just Another Warehouse

From the outside, a data center can look like a very large warehouse. That comparison quickly breaks down once a county begins reviewing one.

A large data center campus may be built in phases over many years. It can require power on the scale of a city, major transmission and substation improvements, significant construction traffic, backup generation, extensive cooling systems, and specialized emergency planning. Water use can vary widely depending on the cooling technology and operating practices, but counties still need reliable information about both normal operations and drought or emergency conditions. Noise can come from cooling equipment, transformers, and generators, including low-frequency sound that is not always captured well by conventional standards.

The projects also move quickly. Developers may be making site, utility, and equipment decisions at the same time a zoning application is being reviewed. Some information may be preliminary, confidential, or controlled by a utility rather than the applicant. Meanwhile, residents understandably want firm answers about water, noise, roads, taxes, and what the completed campus will look like.

That combination of scale, speed, and uncertainty makes data center review different from most zoning cases. Counties are not simply deciding whether a building is compatible with neighboring land. They are being asked to evaluate how a privately developed campus fits into regional systems for water, electricity, transportation, emergency response, and long-range growth.

Data Centers Put County Zoning on the National Stage

What Linn County Learned

Linn County began studying data centers before receiving a formal rezoning application because it was apparent that our existing industrial zoning rules were not designed for this type of development. The process forced us to look beyond familiar questions such as setbacks and landscaping.

We needed to understand the ultimate campus, not only the first building. We needed to ask how much electricity could be required at full buildout and what new generation or transmission infrastructure might follow. We needed to consider water availability, operational reporting, construction impacts, noise, public safety, and community benefits. We also needed to understand where county authority ended and the authority of cities, state agencies, and regulated utilities began.

In February 2026, the Linn County Board of Supervisors adopted a data center ordinance for the unincorporated area. It established separate standards for small and large data centers and addressed setbacks, noise, traffic, roads, emergency planning, and site-plan review. Large-scale projects must complete a water study, enter into a water-use agreement governing monitoring and reporting, and enter into an economic-development agreement addressing community benefits.

One of our most important lessons was that a study is only as useful as what happens after it is completed. A water study can describe expected demand, but an agreement can require continuing monitoring, data sharing, and a process for responding to drought or other constraints. A noise report can predict impacts, but an enforceable standard establishes what must happen if actual operations exceed them. Counties should think about how information will be verified, updated, and enforced throughout the life of the project.

We also learned that even a detailed ordinance does not answer every regional question. In July, the Board adopted a temporary moratorium on new large-scale data center rezoning applications while the County studies cumulative impacts on water, electrical infrastructure, emergency response, transportation, and long-range land use. The purpose is not to permanently prohibit development. It is to give the County time to coordinate with cities, utilities, regional organizations, and state agencies before making decisions that could shape growth for decades.

A Billion-Dollar Announcement Is Not a Billion-Dollar Tax Base

The fiscal discussion deserves special attention because it is easy for public expectations to get ahead of the facts.

When a company announces a \$1 billion investment, that figure may include the land, buildings, servers, cooling equipment, electrical infrastructure, batteries, generators, cabling, and other machinery needed to operate the facility. It does not mean that \$1 billion will be added to the local property tax base.

Iowa property tax is primarily imposed on real property such as land, buildings, and improvements. Iowa law also provides a property tax exemption for qualifying data center property other than land and buildings, including computers (and CPUs/GPUs), cooling systems, certain power infrastructure, racking, cabling, backup generation, and batteries. Unfortunately, the equipment exempted from the assessed valuation of data center buildings makes up the bulk of the total investment amount. Additional abatements, exemptions, tax increment financing arrangements, or development agreements can further affect the revenue ultimately received by each taxing jurisdiction.

Data Centers Put County Zoning on the National Stage

This does not mean a data center cannot produce meaningful local revenue. It means county officials should distinguish among announced investment, assessed value, taxable value, and actual revenue. Those are four different numbers.

The assessor should be involved early, before investment figures are repeated in public presentations or used to justify incentives. Counties should ask for a phase-by-phase estimate of taxable land and building value, identify the assumptions behind any exemptions or abatements, and calculate how revenue would be distributed among the county, schools, cities, and other jurisdictions. Those projections should then be compared with public costs, including roads, inspections, emergency preparedness, administration, and other infrastructure commitments.

Advice for Other Counties

The first recommendation I would offer other counties is simple: do not wait until an application is filed. Decide how your code defines a data center, whether project size should trigger different standards and where this use may be appropriate. Once land has been assembled and project timelines have been announced, it becomes much harder to have a deliberate and measured policy discussion.

Second, review the entire planned campus. Require a master plan, phasing schedule and reasonable estimates of full-buildout power, water, traffic, and infrastructure needs. A series of individually acceptable buildings may create a very different cumulative impact.

Third, assemble a county team. Planning staff cannot answer these questions alone. Assessors, engineers, emergency managers, public health officials, auditors, attorneys, and economic-development staff all see different parts of the project. Outside technical expertise may also be necessary.

Finally, coordinate beyond county lines. Data centers may be located in one jurisdiction, served by utilities in another and supported by infrastructure affecting an entire region. Cities, counties, utilities, and state agencies will not always have the same authority or interests, but they should be working from the same basic information.

County zoning will not decide the future of artificial intelligence. It will, however, help decide how the infrastructure supporting that future is built, who bears its costs, and whether local communities share in its benefits. Counties do not need to approach data centers as either an automatic economic windfall or an unacceptable threat. Our responsibility is to ask good questions, verify the answers, and make sure that the commitments made during the approval process remain meaningful long after the public hearing is over.

An Ounce of Prevention

The old adage, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” truly embodies the importance of a viable, successful, working Safety Committee! In 1736, Benjamin Franklin wrote this phrase to give advice about fire safety in Philadelphia. His core idea was that small, early actions save you from large, difficult work later. In today’s context, a Safety Committee can reduce workplace injuries which translates to saving budget dollars and cents.

A Safety Committee plays an important role in keeping the workplace hazard-free. Committees function primarily by:

- **Investigating** near-misses and root causes of past injuries. Representatives should know how to recognize hazards and understand basic principles for preventing them.
- **Conducting** routine safety walk-throughs and audits by identifying hazard and unsafe work practices that are likely to cause serious injuries.
- **Fostering** a proactive safety culture that empowers employees.

A Safety Committee serves as a vital communication bridge between county leadership and the front-line workers who face daily risks. Often, the best solutions to workplace hazards come directly from the employees performing the tasks. Committees composed of representatives from different departments (e.g., road crews, public health, county recorder, sheriff’s office) allow staff members to voice concerns and contribute workable solutions. When employees feel that their safety is genuinely prioritized and their feedback leads to tangible changes, workplace morale, and job satisfaction inevitably improve.

Establishing a county Safety Committee is a proven strategy to protect your most valuable assets: your employees and the taxpayers. By fostering labor-management collaboration, these committees should actively identify hazards, reduce workers’ compensation claims, and cultivate a proactive culture of safety across all county departments.

Counties in Iowa deliver a wide array of vital services. Supporting an employee Safety Committee is one of the most effective ways for county officials to ensure a secure, compliant, and thriving work environment.

Forming a Safety Committee doesn’t have to be an overwhelming administrative task. The process should include the following actionable steps:

1. **Secure leadership buy-in:** The Board of Supervisors and department heads must fully support the committee, providing the necessary backing and resources for the group to thrive. With turnover from elections, retirements, transfers, and promotions, this is an on-going process.
2. **Assemble a diverse team:** Ensure that representatives from every major department—including both management and field/office staff—are invited to participate.
3. **Define clear roles:** Assign roles such as chairperson and secretary, and establish a regular meeting schedule (e.g., monthly or quarterly).
4. **Draft a charter:** Create a written document that clearly outlines the committee’s goals, scope, and procedures so all members understand their responsibilities.

County officials looking for additional guidance or resources do not have to do this alone. The Iowa Municipalities Workers Compensation Association (IMWCA) provides valuable risk management tools, training resources, and hands-on assistance with Safety Committee implementation.



Willene White
County Risk Management Services,
Inc. (CRMS) representing IMWCA
www.crmsia.com

An Ounce of Prevention

Workers' compensation Safety Committees are vital in Iowa because they directly reduce workplace injuries and **lower workers' compensation premiums**. By fostering collaboration between workers and management, they identify local workplace hazards and keep counties strictly aligned with OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) rules and regulations.

Safety Committee can reduce injuries which translates to saving budget dollars. The insurance term for an injury is "loss." Below is the formula for **every** Iowa workers' compensation experience modification number calculation.

$$\frac{\text{Actual Primary Losses} + \text{Ballast} + \text{Weighting} + \text{Actual Excess Losses} + (1 \text{ Weighting Value}) + \text{Expected Excess Losses}}{\text{Expected Primary Losses} + \text{Ballast} + \text{Weighting} + \text{Actual Excess Losses} + (1 \text{ Weighting Value}) + \text{Expected Excess Losses}}$$

If you take note, the factors are made up of "losses" inputted three times above the line and three times below, plus other "values". Losses, or injuries, directly impact the experience modification number (mod) which is specific to your county. The end result: the mod number directly impacts the amount a county pays for workers' compensation insurance.

It is important to note that a Safety Committee is not a disciplinary body, nor is it meant to replace management's ultimate responsibility for safety. Rather, it is an advisory group designed to act as the "eyes and ears" of the organization, working hand-in-hand with department heads, IMWCA, and ISAC to maintain a safe environment.

Investing time into an active Safety Committee is a proactive investment in the operational efficiency and long-term well-being of your county, and your county employees.

Learn more about implementing and running a safety committee with videos and resources available at www.imwca.org. Here you'll find a recorded webinar on "Conducting Effective Safety Meetings," model programs, and a tremendous library of trainings, checklists, and more.

CRMS serves as the bridge between counties in Iowa, and their agents, and IMWCA. We work with officials and local insurance agents to help counties access workers' compensation coverages and resources to help prevent and respond to loss. CRMS programs are endorsed by ISAC. Please reach out to your local agent or any of the CRMS representatives with questions. Learn more about CRMS at crmsia.com.

2026-2027 Calendar

August 2026

- 9-14 NCRAAO Conference
(Dickinson, ND)
19-21 ISAC Annual Conference
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

September 2026

- 15-18 ISSDA Fall Jail School
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
30-10/2 ISAC Board of Directors Retreat
(Clayton County, IA)

October 2026

- 5-7 ISAA Fall School
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
7-8 Fall IEHA Conference
(FFA Enrichment Center, Ankeny)
13-16 IAAO Conference
(Calgary, Canada)

November 2026

- 18-19 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting
(ISAC Office)

December 2026

- 2-4 80th Annual Iowa County Engineers Conference
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

January 2027

- 7-8 New County Officer's School
(The Meadows Event and Conference Center)
28 Statewide Supervisors Meeting
(Embassy Suites Des Moines Downtown)

February 2027

- 19-23 NACo Legislative Conference
(Washington, D.C.)

March 2027

- 10 ISAC Legislative Reception
(Hilton Des Moines Downtown)
11-12 ISAC Spring Conference
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at ksebern@iowacounties.org.

2026 ISAC Preferred Vendors

Endorsed Elite Preferred Vendors

County Risk Management Services, Inc.
representing IMWCA
Assured Partners

Elite Preferred Vendors

Community State Bank
Murphy Tractor and Equipment Co.
Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa

Endorsed Platinum Preferred Vendor

Iowa Communities Assurance Pool (ICAP)
Iowa Public Agency Investment Trust
(IPAIT)

Platinum Preferred Vendors

Ahlers & Cooney, P.C.
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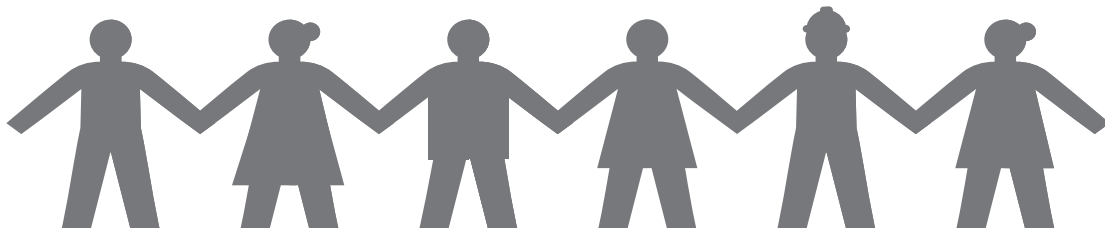
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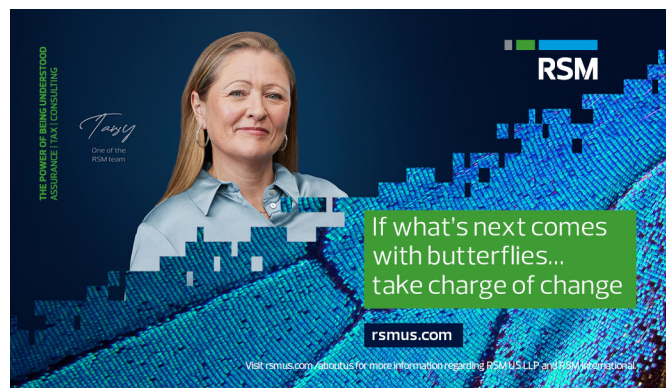
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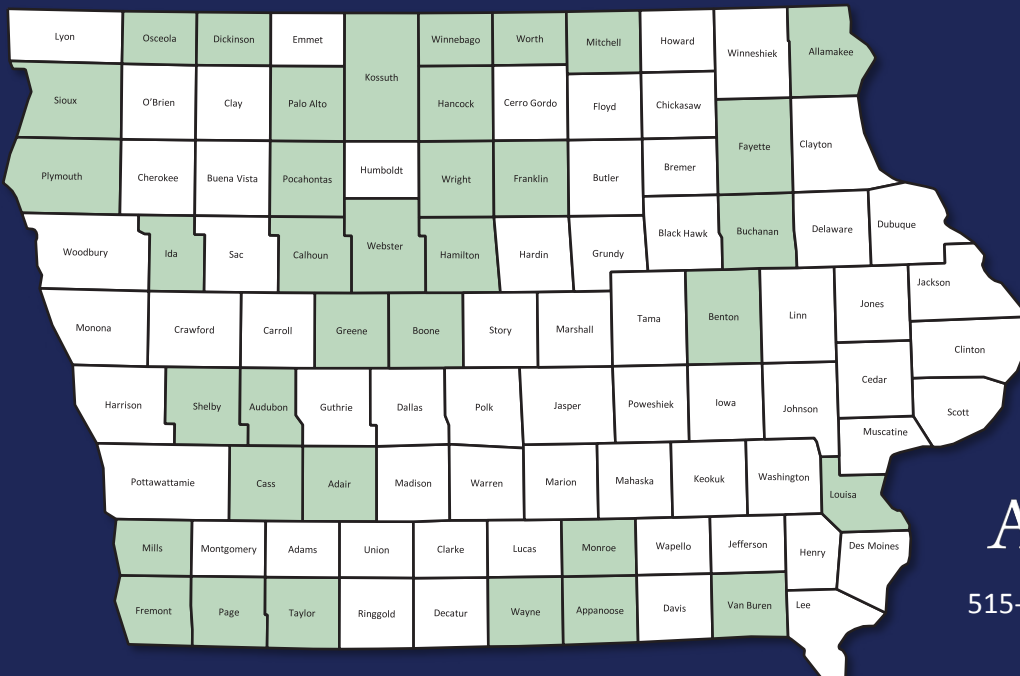
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