



State of Nebraska

EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

Public Servant Recognition Month

October 2025

Dear Extraordinary State Public Servant,

Thank you for your tireless effort, commitment, and servant heart. It is my honor to recognize the service you provide citizens who rely on you to help address their needs, as well as support your agency colleagues.



You have earned The Excellence in Leadership Award, which highlights public servants whose job performance exceeds the highest standards and who have contributed to the overall effectiveness of their agencies.

More than 3,400 public servants have received this honor. This year, you and 98 other new recipients join this distinguished list. Honorees are chosen based on character traits and core values like teamwork, customer service, visionary leadership, doing what is right, as well as performing your very best. The fact that you have been chosen reflects the respect you have earned and the value that you bring to your team.

On behalf of all Nebraskans, thank you for answering the call every day to make the lives of our citizens better.

Please take time to celebrate your accomplishment. Thank you again for your exemplary service!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Pillen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Governor Jim Pillen

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Administrative Services **Alyssa Becker**

Alyssa has been with DAS HR Shared Services (HRSS) for five years. Starting in 2024 and going through April 2025, Alyssa played a large and vital role in transitioning DHHS payroll from DAS HRSS to the newly established DHHS payroll team. Alyssa filled the primary training role for the new DHHS team, consisting of several individuals and supervisors, meeting with them regularly and training on all the different DHHS payrolls. The quality and consistency of her training, as well as the collaboration between the HRSS team and the new DHHS payroll members that she facilitated over the span of months, contributed to a seamless and successful transition of several payrolls to DHHS in April 2025. The DHHS team was able to take over the largest payroll set in the State and was prepared to be self-sufficient going forward thanks to Alyssa's dedication and leadership. She accomplished all this while maintaining her own payrolls, and was timely and without error on every single one. Alyssa embodies the attention to detail and responsiveness to customers that HRSS strives for every day.



Administrative Services **Ron Carlson**

Ron started as an intern with the auditor of public accounts before being hired in a full time role. He moved to DAS accounting where he was instrumental in implementing the State's current accounting system. Having 47 years of service, Ron is an invaluable asset to the state, both within DAS and also for the enterprise. Ron is known as a subject matter expert in many areas of State accounting and state accounting systems. He is patient and respectful when fielding questions and explaining how things work to others. Ron brings a positive attitude to work everyday. He is one of the hardest working individuals in the division.



Administrative Services **Shawn Davis**

Shawn has been a dedicated print shop employee for over 20 years and has taken on the role of printing services supervisor within the last year. On a daily basis, he works with his team to set up and print daily jobs on time with accuracy. Shawn has extensive background experience with variable data printing as well as setting up jobs for mailing using mail sort software. Recently, he worked with multiple customers including 20 State agencies, the City of Lincoln, and various Nebraska counties, to make the transition to a new print server as smooth as possible. Shawn is always willing to collaborate with other agencies to understand their printing needs and strives to do his daily work with a positive outlook and enthusiastic demeanor.

Administrative Services **Matthew Hansen**

Matthew currently serves the State as a procurement manager with the Materiel Division's State Purchasing Bureau (SPB). Before moving into a managerial role, Matthew showed great leadership on the team by having a proactive attitude towards process improvement and helping those around him learn and grow. As a manager, he is dedicated to leading from the front, ensuring that he is available for his team and willing to help them understand the "why" whenever possible. Matthew has also worked closely with SPB's training coordinator to develop and present statewide training to ensure procurement professionals across agencies have the resources and knowledge needed to be good stewards of public funds.



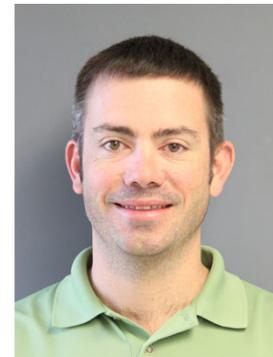
Agriculture **Liam Dunn**

Liam's work covers the western Nebraska Panhandle and extends into central parts of the state. In addition to his work with the Commercial Feed Program, Liam regularly assists the entomology program by conducting phytosanitary inspections. He is a valued teammate across multiple programs, using his expertise to support initiatives such as the hemp program through sampling and inspections. His willingness to step in wherever needed exemplifies his dedication and versatility. Along with his hard work across programs, Liam approaches each day with a welcoming attitude, fostering trust with customers and exemplifying the high standards the NDA strives to uphold in public service. His excellent customer service makes him a trusted and welcome face among the many firms he serves, providing practical, common-sense solutions and resources to help them achieve and maintain federal and state compliance. Over the years, he has cultivated strong relationships with the firms he oversees, consistently offering support they can rely on.



Agriculture **Erik Pearson**

As Laboratory Administrator, Erik treats those in the lab like a close-knit family, ensuring every team member has the tools they need to succeed each day. He goes above and beyond to show appreciation for their hard work by fostering an open and welcoming environment with frequent check-ins, praise, and encouragement. Erik joined the NDA laboratory in 2013. Through dedication and consistent effort, he was promoted to Agriculture Laboratory Division Administrator in 2021. In this leadership role, Erik has intentionally built and strengthened relationships across all areas of the lab and within the broader Department of Agriculture. Erik continually seeks ways to develop and coach his team, offering external training, encouraging innovation, and promoting cross-training across all lab areas. His passion for creating a positive workplace has fostered a strong, collaborative team culture and stands as a testament to his exceptional leadership.





Attorney General Dana Hoffman

Dana has served the Attorney General's Office for more than 36 years with unwavering dedication and integrity. As director of operations, she has been a trusted and stabilizing presence through four different administrations. Before joining the Attorney General's Office, Dana worked in the Governor's office under Governor Kay Orr. Throughout her distinguished tenure, Dana has demonstrated exceptional leadership, guiding teams and processes with professionalism, precision, and a deep sense of responsibility. She is widely respected for her tireless work ethic, institutional knowledge, and ability to navigate complex operational challenges with calm and competence. Beyond her administrative excellence, Dana is recognized for her genuine commitment to helping others and her work reflects an enduring dedication to the mission of the office: upholding justice, protecting the public interest, and serving Nebraskans with honor. Dana's career stands as a testament to the value of steadfast leadership, principled service, and the profound impact of a lifetime devoted to public service.



Attorney General Zachary Pohlman

Zachary serves as deputy solicitor general, representing the State of Nebraska, its agencies, and officers in high-profile litigation. A native of Omaha, Zach earned his B.A. summa cum laude in economics, philosophy, and theology from Rockhurst University and his J.D. summa cum laude from the University of Notre Dame Law School, where he served as editor in chief of Volume 96 of the Notre Dame Law Review. Following law school, Zach clerked for Judge Steven M. Colloton on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit and Justice Jonathan Papik of the Nebraska Supreme Court. Zach regularly publishes scholarly articles on statutory interpretation, choice of law, and federal courts, and his work has appeared in the *George Mason Law Review*, *Notre Dame Law Review*, *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, and *Kansas Law Review*, among others. Outside work, Zach enjoys spending time with his wife and four children, playing the banjo, woodworking, and cheering on the Huskers and Fighting Irish.



Banking and Finance Darcy Bailar

Deputy Director Darcy Bailar is recognized for leading the Department through its rigorous five-year accreditation, earning the rare distinction of meeting the national standard with no corrective comments. She addressed staffing gaps with innovative underfills, blending training, and cross-crew skill sharing, enabling deadlines to be met without added staff. Her cost-conscious leadership aligned the digital asset specialist duties with existing teams and leveraged AI to assist in the creation of a digital asset examination manual. This first ever manual, considering the examination role of a stablecoin issuer, was produced at a cost savings of over \$100,000 compared with previous vendor supplied solutions. Through her commitment to excellence, technology adoption, and fiscal responsibility, Darcy demonstrates the attributes of a true Nebraska public servant; having strengthened the Department's ability to meet its mission.

Banking and Finance **Alex Thorson**

Alex is dynamic leader and proactive manager who consistently sets a strong example for his team. In 2025, he graduated from the ABA Stonier Graduate School of Banking, also earning a 2025 Wharton Leadership Certificate. Despite achieving a senior leadership role as a review examiner, he continued to advance his financial expertise, thereby also enriching the Department's depth. Alex manages a case load of institutions, supervises a field crew as a second level supervisor, and plays a critical role on the digital assets team. Alex took on the need for a digital assets examination manual and digital reporting, rallying a team of experts along the way to contribute and edit. His team were the first to use AI to refine the digital asset exam manual as well as consider prompt updates of the manual as federal regulation changed in 2025. Alex is a life long learner committed to being a productive and creative member of the Department.



Blind and Visually Impaired Commission **Elizabeth Heidenreich**

Lizzie exemplifies excellence in leadership through her forward-thinking approach, strong teamwork, and genuine respect for people. When her supervisor's position became vacant, she seamlessly stepped in to take on additional responsibilities with a positive and can-do attitude. Lizzie consistently demonstrates effective communication, ensuring follow-up on all matters, and she aligns resources strategically to support both staff and consumers. Her kindness and consumer-centered perspective shine in every decision she makes. Over the past year, she has led special projects with precision and dedication, including conducting a thorough audit and record-keeping process, as well as spearheading the implementation of the AWARE BEP module and managing all related data. Lizzie's leadership, professionalism, and commitment make her an outstanding candidate for this award.



Blind and Visually Impaired Commission **Pam Rademacher**

Pam demonstrates excellence in leadership through her autonomy, initiative, and unwavering commitment to both her team and her work. As the Lincoln district supervisor, she manages her responsibilities with confidence and skill, needing little direction while consistently following through on every task. Even while maintaining a significant caseload, Pam approaches her work with a positive attitude, asks thoughtful questions, and fosters strong relationships with her coworkers. She is always ready to lend a hand, taking on projects that others might decline, such as planning a statewide staff meeting or organizing the college workshop and employment seminar. Her willingness to help, paired with her exceptional ability to execute at a high level, makes her an invaluable leader and a deserving candidate for this award.





Correctional Services **Makenzie Delgado**

Faced with a critical situation, Makenzie stepped up to the challenge with courage and commitment. As a case manager at the Reception and Treatment Center, she took on the role of acting unit manager after a serious staff assault. During this critical time, she stabilized operations and implemented key improvements that strengthened the unit's functionality and morale. Her leadership in this crisis showcased her composure, problem-solving skills, and unwavering commitment to her team and the facility. In addition to Makenzie's regular duties, she coordinates the prison fellowship program, creating transformative opportunities for incarcerated individuals and fostering collaboration with external partners. She leads by example and her reliability has earned her the deep respect of her peers, making her an invaluable asset to Correctional Services.



Correctional Services **Kimberly Franssen**

Kim's extensive knowledge of human resource systems and policies not only make her a positive influence at the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women but also positions her as the go-to person for supervisors and leaders across the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. She is always willing to lend her expertise to help the department navigate system upgrades and has been instrumental in maintaining smooth operations by ensuring an efficient hiring process. Her exceptional knowledge and commitment to the team are vital to the mission to keep people safe. Kim's dedication to her team members and her ability to positively impact facility operations make her an invaluable asset to the entire agency.



Correctional Services **Nikki Hodges**

Nikki provides excellent structure and support to individuals re-entering their communities. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure the well-being of her clients and takes the time to listen and provide guidance and support. Nikki shows genuine care and inspires individuals re-entering their communities to take ownership of their lives. Respected among her peers and the clients she serves, Nikki is known for her unwavering commitment to her work. Her flexibility and ability to foster teamwork contribute to a positive environment and a successful reentry.

Correctional Services Malisa Kringle

Malisa is a catalyst for change in the Corrections population's rehabilitation. As the assistant deputy director - programs, she spearheaded groundbreaking programs that promote continuous growth and create a better future for those in the Department's care. Malisa was instrumental in launching the prison education program at Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) facilities, which has enabled hundreds of people to achieve their dream of higher education. Additionally, she was a driving force behind New Freedom, a first of its kind gang intervention and desistance program at NDCS. She has also played a significant role in organizing the intentional peer support program inside NDCS facilities. Through her innovative work, she has helped position Nebraska as a national leader in rehabilitative services and has helped countless individuals transform their future.



Correctional Services Jennifer Schultz

Lieutenant Jennifer Schultz is a leader who continually works to foster her team's growth and support the safe operations of the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI). Her positive attitude greatly inspires those around her. Lt. Schultz leads with empathy and takes time to listen to concerns, promoting a healthy work environment for her team. She calmly handles any obstacle she encounters, and her leadership is recognized and appreciated among her peers. Lt. Schultz consistently works to support morale and collaboration at TSCI. Her commitment to the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services mission and her effective leadership is felt throughout TSCI.



Correctional Services Cheryl Singleton

For Sergeant Cheryl Singleton, leadership isn't just a title — it's a commitment to supporting her entire team. Over her 12-year career at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, Sgt. Singleton has consistently gone above and beyond to support her colleagues, dedicating countless hours to covering vacancies across multiple areas in the facility. Sgt. Singleton is a leader who is passionate about her role. She sees challenges not as setbacks, but as opportunities for team growth and learning. Her willingness to tackle any task, big or small, with a smile on her face allows people around her to feel appreciated and welcomed.





Correctional Services Carolyn Sommer

Unit Manager Carolyn Sommer truly is the heart of the Work Ethic Camp (WEC), understanding the importance of both security and rehabilitation. Even with an incredibly busy schedule, she prioritizes her staff, holding regular one-on-one meetings and supporting their growth and development. She is known as a leader who inspires both new and seasoned staff. Carolyn is also active in building morale among the entire team through employee activity committee events. With a focus on both encouraging program participation and effectively communicating Nebraska Department of Correctional Services safety procedures, Carolyn is an invaluable asset to WEC.



Correctional Services Alicia Staiger

Alicia has created a genuine and supportive work culture at the Community Corrections Center - Lincoln, where her team doesn't just work — they thrive. Her extraordinary dedication to her team is evident in her efforts to enhance operations and morale. She cultivates support by always being the first to respond in times of need, readily stepping in to assist in any capacity. Alicia's proactive nature is a constant source of support for her colleagues, strengthening her team and fostering a culture where everyone feels respected.



Correctional Services Sommer Westbay

Sommer is a Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) leader whose commitment to the agency's mission is evident through the way she approaches her work each and every day. She supervises two separate canteen areas at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. In addition to these duties, she has gone above and beyond to assist with canteen operations at the reception and treatment center when the facility had a vacancy in this area. Her adaptability and positive attitude inspire those around her. Sommer's extraordinary ability to balance her own responsibilities while assisting others makes her an invaluable asset to NDCS.

Correctional Services David Williams

David is a respected and dedicated leader who makes a profound impact on his team. As the shop operations manager for both the Nebraska State Penitentiary and Cornhusker State Industries, he has been instrumental in creating new, more efficient procedures for shop operators. David has a genuine commitment to the people around him. Known for his positive attitude and collaborative spirit, he takes time to listen to his peers, offering support and advice whenever needed. He empowers his teams to succeed by creating an environment where they feel empowered to reach their full potential. David's ability to inspire his teams to new heights is a testament to his dedication and outstanding leadership in the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services.



Crime Commission Chris Carlile

Chris came to Nebraska from California, obtaining a degree in Criminal Justice from Southeast Community College. She has been instrumental in criminal justice and victim services funding across Nebraska. She has risen to the challenges faced at the Crime Commission and takes on additional work to lend a hand when she sees a need. Chris is constantly working with others and sharing the knowledge she has. Chris is making a name for herself in the criminal justice community by building relationships with stakeholders, excelling in her devotion to customer service, and maintaining the excellent reputation of the Crime Commission. Chris is a true team player, collaborator, and proactive leader always leading by example and is consistently striving for continuous improvement at the Crime Commission. Other than spending time with her two boys and husband, she has a passion for photography, painting, and reading true crime.



Crime Commission Jessica Wagoner

Jessica has taken her responsibility as a leader very seriously. Jessica graduated the State of Nebraska Leadership Academy, after beginning her new role, to improve upon her leadership and management skills. She has taken every opportunity to demonstrate to team members they are valued by making accomplishments known publicly and individually. Jessica makes her expectations very clear and reinforces these expectations by setting an example. Jessica has consistently looked at processes in her area of responsibility with an eye on improvement and efficiency and played an instrumental role in setting up the case management system currently being used to track and manage misconduct investigations. Jessica has also realigned roles and responsibilities with work load to increase efficiency and remove redundancy in her grant programs.





Deaf and Hard of Hearing Kim Davis

Kim currently serves as community services manager. In 2024, she provided critical support to the Commission during the recruitment and transition of the executive director, serving as interim executive director. During that time, she maintained a steady and effective management approach ensuring the Commission continued to deliver essential services to deaf, blind, and hard of hearing individuals, as well as the entities and stakeholders who serve this population across Nebraska, while also supporting the external recruitment process. Kim demonstrated strong leadership and a deep understanding of the Commission’s work, ensuring a smooth handover. She also supported the new executive director in reviewing the Commission’s operations, offering valuable insights into internal processes, community needs, and government engagement. These efforts contributed to the development and Board endorsement of the Commission’s 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.



Education Dorann Avey

Dorann has served as the director of digital learning at the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) for over eight years, earning a strong reputation as a trusted expert both statewide and nationally. Her insight and expertise are frequently sought by colleagues and partners, reflecting her credibility and influence in the field. A collaborative leader, Dorann fosters teamwork, encourages different perspectives, and builds trust to drive shared success. Her ability to communicate complex ideas with clarity makes her a highly effective and engaging educator. Known for her generosity and support, she uplifts those around her while setting high standards, investing in the growth and development of her colleagues. Dorann is also a forward-thinker, consistently championing proactive strategies and best practices to advance digital learning. Beyond her core responsibilities, she leads multiple committees and serves on state and national boards, exemplifying her commitment, leadership, and lasting impact on education.



Education Vicki Kelly

Vicki has served as a rehabilitation specialist for Nebraska VR for over three years. She is dedicated to empowering high school students through meaningful, individualized services that support their long-term success. Vicki continually sharpens her instructional and technological skills, creating innovative learning experiences and generously sharing resources with her team to improve collective impact. She actively partners with local businesses to provide students with real-world, work-based learning opportunities, effectively connecting classroom learning with community engagement. Vicki also leads a committee focused on developing a streamlined “mapping curriculum” for pre-employment transition counselors, making it easier to access structured, impactful activities. Her leadership and forward-thinking approach ensure students and colleagues alike benefit from well-designed, accessible, and future-focused educational opportunities.

Education **Naomi Kohles**

Naomi joined the Nebraska Department of Education 2018 and was promoted to help desk specialist senior in 2021. She exemplifies teamwork through her collaborative mindset, respectful communication, and commitment to high-quality service. Known for her empathy and professionalism, Naomi consistently goes above and beyond to support colleagues and stakeholders, helping teams align and achieve shared goals. Beyond her daily responsibilities, Naomi actively contributes to cross-functional projects and volunteers to support broader team initiatives. Her proactive approach and reliability make her a go-to resource for navigating complex challenges. She also plays a key role in fostering a respectful workplace by ensuring clear communication and promoting a positive team culture. Naomi's dedication, problem-solving skills, and collaborative spirit strengthen both team performance and interdepartmental relationships, making her an invaluable asset to the NDE.



Education **Brian Wojcik**

Brian, an assistive technology program supervisor with over six years at the Nebraska Department of Education, is a dedicated professional focused on enhancing educational outcomes for students with disabilities. He has collaborated with educators, parents, and caregivers to create impactful e-trainings and webinars, empowering stakeholders across the state. Actively engaged in national conferences, Brian brings innovative practices and expert insights to Nebraska, strengthening the state's commitment to inclusive education. Known for his collaborative spirit, tireless work ethic, and "can-do" attitude, Brian consistently goes above and beyond to turn ideas into impactful solutions. His leadership, passion, and commitment to student success have left a lasting mark on the education community.



Environment & Energy **Jerad Jelinek**

Shortly after Jerad started, the Clean Water and Drinking Water SRF audit began. In lieu of consultant completing the financials, Jerad assumed the responsibility. Normally a months-long process, Jerad completed the task in weeks. Jerad also made several improvements and NDEE had its best audit. In this past year, Jerad did a lot of work putting together a new budget visual for staff. Jerad was instrumental in the DNR/DEE merger in relation to a timesheet system. There was a tremendous amount of work and coordination between the two agencies, meeting on a weekly basis. Jerad shared his extensive knowledge of Excel with his team and led training on utilizing the program for fiscal tasks. The fiscal team has used this training to make their work more efficient.





Environment and Energy

Sarah Klescewski

Over the past year Sarah has made significant improvements to the superfund program. The first achievement was her assisting in legislation passed to provide a long-term funding mechanism for the State's cost share obligations. Sarah co-authored an EPA/NDEE memo that helps define roles and responsibilities once a superfund site transfers to 100% state responsibility. The superfund program had noticed some inconsistencies amongst EPA project managers when the State wanted to make changes during O&M. After numerous meetings it was decided the best course of action would be a memo that would lay out the responsibilities for each party. Sarah took it upon herself to draft a significant portion of the memo, while working collaboratively with her EPA counterparts. Sarah was praised for her excellent work in responding to the State Auditor during the Department's first ever annual comprehensive financial report audit as it relates to the superfund program.



Equal Opportunity Commission

Christine Shutzer

Christine holds a BA in English, with a minor in philosophy as well as a MA in English from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. Prior to joining the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission, Christine worked in management positions in the service industry, honing her customer service skills and refining her understanding of employment laws. In her role as an EOC Investigator II, she has proven to be a natural leader, mentoring new investigators. She has excellent case management skills, consistently meeting/exceeding established agency goals which greatly assists the agency in meeting its responsibilities to the public. Christine has keen customer service skills, providing thoughtful, yet neutral communication with the public and staff. When there is high call volume for technical assistance, Christine doesn't hesitate to volunteer to return calls. She has made a meaningful impact on the mission of the agency.



Ethanol Board

Amber Rucker

Amber is the Nebraska Ethanol Board's (NEB) marketing and finance manager. She joined the NEB staff in 2016 and holds a journalism and public relations degree from Northwest Missouri State University, and a Master of Arts in grant writing, management, and evaluation from Concordia University Chicago. Amber demonstrated excellence in leadership during a challenging year for the NEB in terms of staffing, personnel, and budget. During this time, Amber maintained her usual high standard of excellence while going above and beyond to ensure the NEB continued to operate effectively. As a classic self-starter, she is proactive in resolving accounting, budget, and marketing issues in an efficient and constructive manner. Amber has faced a host of accounting and budget related issues and has consistently worked toward successfully resolving the issues. Amber works effectively with her colleagues in the office and other agencies and consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility.

Health and Human Services Oscar Aparicio

Oscar serves as a mental health specialist at the Norfolk Regional Center (NRC). One and a half years later, Oscar was promoted to mental health security unit supervisor (team lead) of the 3 East Treatment Unit. Oscar's prior experience included production and delivery services. Upon joining DHHS, Oscar quickly demonstrated excellent human services skills and became an integral addition to the Norfolk Regional Center and has continued working to improve the regional center for both patients and staff. Oscar's teamwork, communication, dedication to safety, kindness, compassion, integrity, and reliability make him an exemplary supervisor and a valued member of NRC.



Health and Human Services Mike Balderson

As the BSDC safety coordinator, Mike is the facilitator of teamwork and collaboration each and everyday. In this role, he has to conduct safety drills with people who don't report to him, where he needs them to perform in certain ways to conduct the drill successfully. Mike had developed great relationships with people who look forward to the next drill to exceed his expectations. The other trait that is notable for Mike is that he values people. Mike knows everyone at the BSDC campus, and he knows what is important to and for them. He takes the time to get to know everyone. He makes extra efforts to help everyone at any time with anything.



Health and Human Services Linda Barna

Linda embodies all aspects of excellent service. She has dedicated her work life to ensuring all DHHS staff statewide have a great place to work in order to serve the citizens of Nebraska. Linda was put into the position of leading the team during a years plus time where there was no director in her department. Linda juggled her normal job duties with the duties of an interim director and led the Department through new office openings, furniture changes, and remodels. She values the people at DHHS and continues to assist all staff with their needs. Linda also continues to model great teamwork with all levels of leadership and staff by communicating directly with staff statewide. DHHS believes that these efforts put staff at ease during stressful times. Linda recognizes that and pays extra attention to those in crisis or needing help.





Health and Human Services

Marge Bauerly

Marge has served as the DHHS regulations paralegal for over eight years. She has been instrumental in ensuring that hundreds of agency regulations are promulgated. She coordinates with staff, tracks drafting progress, drafts all public hearing notices, reviews all supporting documentation for completeness, conducts all regulation public hearings, creates the statutorily required documentation, and answers questions from internal and external stakeholders. She also handles all agency guidance documents, assists with statutory reporting for guidance documents, and ensures that all guidance documents are properly posted. Marge goes above and beyond in everything that she does. She identifies a need within our team, and she takes it upon herself to fill in, offer assistance, or correct an issue. She volunteers to help train new staff, covers for teammates in areas, and drafts internal documentation on procedures to help everyone. Marge is a vital member of her team.



Health and Human Services

Suzana Borowski

As an experienced administrator with over 16 years in child welfare and direct services, Suzana leads statewide initiatives at Nebraska DHHS's Children & Family Services to strengthen safety, resiliency, and workforce development for children, youth, and families. With a background spanning frontline supervision to statewide program management, Suzana brings a systems-level perspective to policy design, staff training, and strategic planning. Known for cross-sector collaboration and operational innovation, Suzana focuses on driving sustainable improvements in service delivery, team performance, and outcomes across Nebraska's protection and safety programs.



Health and Human Services

Lindsay Braddock

Lindsay is the administrator of the occupational licensure unit in the DHHS Division of Public Health and has demonstrated outstanding leadership in continuous improvement and developing team members. She successfully led a Theory of Constraints project to reduce license timeframes by nearly three months. She also led the Children's Services Licensing Team in making improvements in the fingerprint processing system to significantly reduce the timeframe for completing requests from individuals who work or reside in licensed child care programs. Lindsay's leadership resulted in a major project to stabilize the License Information System which is the database for all occupational licensure data. Lindsay made policy decisions throughout the project, held teammates accountable for their roles, and served as a champion for staff and customers to promote the efficiencies that will be gained.

Health and Human Services Dawn Carillo

Since having Dawn on board, the economic mobility program has seen much improvement. Her network has helped increase the number of third-party partners for SNAP E&T. She demonstrates a willingness to listen to ideas as well as showing creativity. Dawn's entire demeanor is welcoming and personable. She welcomes change and improvements for her programs which creates an environment where teamwork and cross-functional collaboration flourishes. Dawn's active listening skills allow her to provide great customer service both internally and externally. She takes time and shows leadership in answering questions across the department. Dawn's caring and thoughtfulness makes her a go to resource for her colleagues.



Health and Human Services Joan Feeney

Joan offers support to her peers, assists her colleagues in difficult situations, meets with families and participants, and serves as a valuable partner with the local school system. She sets an example for others by her willingness to go the extra mile for those she serves. Joan's rapport with her coworkers is obvious and she creates interactive and engaging ways of training her team and being proactive in helping them learn the policies and process changes allowing them to complete their jobs well and serve people in the best way possible. Joan goes above and beyond to make sure her team knows they are valued, that they have an important role and that they have one of the best jobs a person could have, helping others live their best lives. Joan's team is a cohesive group as a result of her efforts to engage them as a team.



Health and Human Services Jace Gatzemeyer

Jace has consistently demonstrated excellence in innovation as a Federal Aid Administrator III. He has developed manuals, tools, and resources used widely by grants managers throughout the Division of Public Health and regularly leads training sessions for diverse groups, including DHHS staff and local partners. Committed to continuous improvement, Jace actively participates in the National Grants Management Association (NGMA), recently achieving Certified Grants Management Specialist (CGMS) certification. He also plays a key role in developing national grants management training standards through an NGMA work group. Within DHHS, Jace exemplifies outstanding customer service, volunteering in a "train-the-trainer" initiative, where he helps colleagues strengthen their customer service skills. Through his work and approach, Jace serves as a mentor, consistently supporting and developing those around him.





Health and Human Services

Delainie Johnson

Delainie serves as the prevention systems administrator at the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services—Division of Behavioral Health. Delainie earned her degree from the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, bringing deep expertise in prevention systems strategy and execution. In this key leadership role, she oversees the state’s prevention infrastructure, such as the no-cost Naloxone program, substance use prevention education, and opioid response activities. Her leadership is defined by proactive vision, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to sustainable, data-informed prevention initiatives.



Health and Human Services

Cristina Johnson

Cristina brings over a decade of full-time experience with the State of Nebraska and currently serves as an administrative specialist within DHHS-CFS. A proud Grand Island native, Cristina developed a strong work ethic detasseling corn which she loved doing every summer and quickly was asked to support the State in a variety of temporary positions from her high school graduation through college. Through her various temporary positions she found her way to the State full time where she has become an essential part of the CFS team. Known as the “glue” that holds many moving parts together, Cristina is deeply committed to operational excellence and takes great pride in celebrating the mission and people of DHHS-CFS. Her dedication, positivity, and behind-the-scenes impact make her an invaluable asset to her team.



Health and Human Services

Suzann Langner

Suzann has 25 years of service to the State of Nebraska. Suzann has had several roles on the N-FOCUS team and is currently an IT Supervisor on the N-FOCUS team. She is responsible for the N-FOCUS production support team. Suzann cares for the user of the N-FOCUS system and strives to eliminate mistakes and find ways to improve N-FOCUS. She is not only open to taking on new projects and learning new ways of doing things, but to lead new processes. Suzann is a constant resource for other team members in mentoring and providing background information on projects. These qualities and her ability to incorporate new ideas into the N-FOCUS system have made her a valuable part of the solution analyst team for N-FOCUS.

Health and Human Services John Meals

As DHHS Chief Financial Officer, John demonstrates Excellence in Leadership and exemplifies the Nebraska Core Values. John recognized the need to consolidate financial responsibilities within the agency that provided more obstacles or barriers than assistance. As a result of his efforts, finance responsibilities for Children and Family Services, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and Behavioral Health have been consolidated to the agency's central finance office. This initiative has resulted in improved customer service, reduced expenses, and improved timeliness and accuracy of fiscal transactions that number in the tens of thousands. John has been integral and critical in identifying and removing redundant expenditures across the DHHS enterprise. His efforts are providing significant efficiencies and value to the Nebraska state taxpayer and have saved the State tens of millions of dollars.



Health and Human Services Rachel Metry

Rachel was born in Wichita, Kansas, and spent most of her life in Nebraska, where small-town values shaped her strong work ethic and passion for helping others. She grew up in Curtis, Nebraska, graduating as class valedictorian and earning her 40-hour medication aide certification while working at an assisted living facility—early experiences that inspired her commitment to human services. In 2013, she began her career with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as an Ongoing Child and Family Services Specialist. Over the past 12 years, she has held multiple roles. She currently serves as a program specialist and tribal liaison for the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Rachel's exceptional performance throughout her tenure at DHHS has been pivotal in several key accomplishments. She has played an instrumental role throughout her career within the Department and she is committed to excellence and collaboration with her team and others.



Health and Human Services Mindy Mousel

Mindy serves as the clinical program manager at Whitehall, a state-operated psychiatric residential treatment facility for adolescent boys. Since joining the team, she has become a catalyst for transformation, leading with vision, dedication, and heart. Mindy's work ethic is unmatched. She has meticulously evaluated every aspect of Whitehall's programming, aligning it with appropriate standards, and elevating services to meet evidence-based best practices. Her leadership style centers on valuing people. Mindy holds regular one-on-one meetings with staff, ensuring they feel heard, respected, and supported. She also revitalized the employee recognition committee, establishing an inclusive process that reflects the voice of the entire campus. Selected for her innovation, forward thinking, and deep commitment to people, Mindy has made Whitehall stronger, more cohesive, and more impactful.





Health and Human Services Holli Penner

Holli is a training coordinator in the DHHS Learning Academy team. In the last year, Holli identified a need and worked to form a team of stakeholders to reinvent the DHHS onboarding programs for new supervisors and public servants, and has seen both projects through to completion. In the process of improving these programs, Holli demonstrated true innovation by developing a system that was easy to use, comprehensive, and coordinated. She brought together relevant stakeholders and involved a diverse team from the start to ensure that the end result was useful for all interested parties. Holli's focus on the end user was clear in her collaborative approach, and her openness to feedback gave the project the breadth and significance it needed to succeed. She is an example of how to define a need, creatively develop and execute an idea to fill that need, bring together teams of different people with different needs and perspectives from around the agency to make that idea a substantial success.



Health and Human Services Amy Redden

Amy is the child care subsidy resource developer coordinator. Amy's current position was newly created a year ago and she has made it what it is today. Amy and her staff support child care providers across Nebraska. Amy has built trust, rapport, and respect with her staff, which allows her to be a strong leader for them. Amy is hands-on and is always willing to jump in and help those she supervises as well as her peers on the larger team. Amy has taken the lead on several initiatives to improve and streamline internal processes. Amy is dedicated to learning and has completed several leadership courses. She exemplifies excellence in leadership each day.



Health and Human Services Christy Rupe

Christy has served the State of Nebraska for over 36 years, between the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC) and the Nebraska Department of Corrections. She returned to the Lincoln Regional Center in 2024 to serve as its director of social work. She continuously demonstrates the motivation to seek positive change, improvement, and teamwork. She utilizes her effective communication skills to serve as an example for others on how working together and maintaining professionalism lead to the betterment of both the individual and the workplace. She has completed multiple projects focused on ensuring adherence to patient rights and improving processes to enable hospital staff to work more efficiently. She plays a significant role in the progress of the LRC, and the LRC is grateful for her contributions.

Health and Human Services Nicki Saenz

Nicki is a supervisor in the Lexington Customer Service Center. She is open to dialogue and does not hesitate to question processes or issues to improve the overall process in helping clients. She makes herself available to her coworkers and is an effective communicator. Nicki works closely with the administration as well as leadership in being innovative and forward thinking on processes and effective approaches to work. She demonstrates that she values her teammates by listening to them and offering them feedback. Nicki has high expectations for herself and others. Every step of the way, Nicki is always questioning the success of the task and how she can help improve the process. Nicki is an asset to the team she serves.



Health and Human Services Kathy Schweitzer

Contributing four decades of service, Kathy brings a rare combination of expertise and humility to her role as a social service worker in the Division of Developmental Disabilities. She leads by example in all aspects of her work and serves as an inspiration to fellow colleagues. Her commitment to caring for those around her is made evident by countless commendations from clients and high praise from coworkers. Kathy labors tirelessly to conduct clinics in remote areas that provide accessibility to families needing specialty clinicians. Superior leadership is demonstrated through her tactful coordination of medical services and the cohesion she builds between providers. In addition to her field work, Kathy manages a considerable individual caseload of diverse clients across three separate assistance programs. She pours compassion into her casework, showing remarkable empathy and understanding to clients. Families have reached out to express gratitude for Kathy's exceptional service.



Health and Human Services Carisa Schweitzer Masek

Carissa exemplifies excellence in leadership due to her dedication to reduce taxpayer burden and improve services for Nebraskans. Once exposed to an area that needs improvement or effort, she is quick to educate herself and develop a nearly masterful knowledge. Through her efforts and dedication, she is the first person to connect disparate points or concepts, bridging gaps, and improving services. Along with other leaders, Carissa was key in identifying over \$255 million in single-year fiscal reductions without reducing services to Nebraska's citizens. Carissa single-handedly and routinely provides executive coaching to senior leadership team members, increasing their division's performance across the vast majority of measures that are tracked. Carissa was instrumental in establishing a standardized project reporting method for all divisions and operational units.





Health and Human Services Bobby Stewart

Bobby goes above and beyond each day to provide his workers with the tips and tools to better their lives and work duties. Bobby will stop whatever he is doing to answer questions for coworkers. He can always be counted on to complete work timely and accurately. Bobby is dependable and shows his team what dedication to the job should look like. Bobby's focus for his team is for them to work together to complete the tasks and help each of them learn and grow. He has provided new workers with resources and tools to be able to navigate their new job roles and to have the support they need to succeed. He is a support for leads and supervisors across the state. He also works with other leaders to help update resources and provide valuable feedback to better the future of our work. Bobby is open to all forms of communication and focuses on leading his team by example to do the best he can.



Health and Human Services Don Whitmire

Don began his career at the Norfolk Regional Center (NRC) as the quality assurance coordinator and advanced to the role of hospital administrator in 2020. He emphasizes the vital importance of NRC's mission—protecting public safety for the citizens of Nebraska while helping those we serve lead better, more fulfilling lives. Through visionary leadership, hands-on coaching, and a commitment to developing both individuals and teamwork, Don has spearheaded significant improvements in care and safety. Since 2020, NRC has achieved an over 75% reduction in the use of restraints and a 91% reduction in staff injuries. He actively encourages leadership team members to openly discuss the “why” behind every decision, fostering transparency, shared purpose, and mutual trust. Workplace culture has also flourished under his guidance, with an emphasis on active participation in morale-boosting initiatives and culture-building efforts.



Health and Human Services Tim A. Wilson

Tim is the administrator of the Office of Emergency Health Systems. He goes out of his way to locate resources and funding for emergency medical services and other responders. He acquired funding for new technology to implement a telehealth pilot project allowing EMTs and paramedics to connect virtually with emergency room specialists while transporting patients. Tim collaborates with Nebraska universities, hospital trauma centers, stroke and STEMI centers, emergency medical services, state agencies, and others to promote quality services. Tim manages a team of highly respected and effective staff all working to provide for the safety and positive outcomes for patients. He understands the challenges facing emergency medical services in part because he is a paramedic and chief of a rural volunteer EMS service. Tim's efforts, experience, and abilities are appreciated.

Health and Human Services Erica Ziemann

Erica serves as the network administrator within the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health. In this role, Erica is the DHHS contract manager overseeing delivery of mental health and substance use disorder services across behavioral health regions, including directing grant and contract administration. As a key DHHS representative, Erica collaborates closely with regional leadership to align programmatic goals, navigate complex grant guidelines, and drive strategic outcomes in behavioral health. Erica's leadership is marked by her collaborative approach to audit readiness, transparent communication, and ability to build strong partnerships across state and regional systems.



Labor Scott Hunzeker

Scott brings more than two decades of experience and leadership to his role. He began his career at the agency in 2000 as a research analyst and is now division director. In his current role, Scott oversees the release of key labor market data—including unemployment rates, employment statistics, and projections—in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. He leads a team of 14 professionals working across multiple federal-state cooperative programs, ensuring high-quality data and meeting all grant deliverables. Scott also manages the agency's core labor market database, which supports NDOL's public-facing data tools and dashboards. His work helps thousands of Nebraskans—jobseekers, businesses, educators, and policymakers—access the timely, reliable information they need to make informed decisions. Known for his collaborative leadership and commitment to innovation, Scott is passionate about making data more accessible and useful for everyone. His forward-thinking approach continues to strengthen Nebraska's workforce and economic insight.



Labor Greg Rosenboom

Greg exemplifies what it means to lead with integrity and effectiveness. His contributions have elevated the quality and credibility of Nebraska's BAM unit and his leadership serves as an example to all around him. Under Greg's guidance, the Nebraska BAM team has consistently demonstrated operational excellence, setting a high standard for other states to follow. His leadership has not only elevated internal performance but has also drawn national recognition. The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) recently praised Nebraska's BAM program in a formal evaluation and uses their written procedures and forms for other states to use as a reference. This acknowledgment is a direct reflection of Greg's ability to foster a culture of accountability and collaboration.





Library Commission

Liz Macias

Liz is the Library Commission’s studio and book circulation support technician. In the Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS), Liz works with a team of dedicated volunteer narrators to record audio versions of local books and magazines for Nebraskans who are blind, visually impaired, or have a disability that prevents them from using regular print materials. Drawing on the diverse backgrounds of these volunteers, Liz identifies their unique strengths and coaches each to perform at their best, making the experience as enjoyable as possible. With her professional broadcasting background, Liz has significantly improved the quality of materials produced in the TBBS studios. She continually looks for ways to enhance recordings, and her keen ear and production expertise ensure that patrons across the state receive high-quality audio. Liz’s skill is matched only by her work ethic. She consistently goes above and beyond, readily assisting wherever needed and handling unexpected challenges with ease.



Library Commission

Mackenzie Marrow

Mackenzie is the Library Commission’s Information Services Technician. Mackenzie joined the information services team in April of 2022 and has made positive contributions to the team since. Mackenzie enjoys a wonderful and easy going relationship with customers and is appreciated for an agile and personal approach to working with the book club collection. Mackenzie has familiarized themselves with the collection and writes book reviews every other week to highlight titles. This expertise allows Mackenzie to collect, select, and weed from this collection as shelving and maintenance needs require. Mackenzie rallied staff to give books to the Linked to Literacy program in the past two years with great success. Mackenzie is enthusiastic about getting books into all kinds of reader’s hands. Mackenzie makes work easier and more enjoyable.



Military/Emergency Management

John “Jack” Hodges

Jack demonstrates exceptional leadership and vision. Following the departure of several project managers and the reassignment of the branch supervisor, Jack stepped up to assume additional responsibilities, ensuring continuity of operations during a critical period. He managed some of the office's largest and most complex projects while simultaneously assumed new initiatives and maintaining high standards across the board. In addition to his project responsibilities, Jack selflessly mentored and trained new team members and his coaching approach has accelerated their development and strengthened the overall capability of the team. He has been a model of effective communication, providing clear, candid, and constructive feedback to both teammates and temporary leadership. Jack’s forward-thinking mindset, team-first attitude, and dedication to continuous improvement have inspired those around him.

Military/Emergency Management **Staci Zuerlein**

Staci has been at the State since 2011, with over a decade of experience in program management, policy analysis, and administrative leadership. She joined the Nebraska Military Department Civil Engineer Squadron March of 2024 and has consistently demonstrated exceptional performance. Staci assumed responsibility for budget, reconciliation, and status of funds for three cooperative agreements totaling over \$2.4 million. She proactively manages financial data systems and trackers, ensuring timely and accurate submission of 270 cash loads and payment approvals in compliance with the Prompt Payment Act. Her reliability and customer-focused approach support efficient invoice processing and pre-audit accuracy, minimizing delays. Staci streamlined financial planning by organizing salary and utility data into a user-friendly format, validated by the National Guard Bureau, to secure necessary funding for critical expenses. Staci fosters a positive, team-oriented work environment and partners with others to complete tasks and resolve issues efficiently.



Motor Vehicles **Beth Hartley**

Beth serves as the program manager for the Motor Carrier Services Division of the Department of Motor Vehicles. During the busiest time of year for the division, Beth successfully sustained high quality service delivery to Nebraska's commercial carriers despite significant staffing shortages and the added challenge of extensive system testing. The testing was critical to the division's upcoming transition to a new, fully modernized computer system which revolutionized how the division served its customers. The demands of this period would have been overwhelming for most, but Beth's strategic foresight, dedication, and exceptional leadership ensured uninterrupted operations, minimal service delays, and a smooth path toward modernization. Beth's commitment and dedication to the agency's customers make her very deserving of this award.



Motor Vehicles **Cheryl Porter**

Cheryl, Nebraska DMV CDL program manager, has exemplified visionary leadership in guiding the Driver License Services (DLS) Division through multiple high-impact projects and transformative initiatives. Through her strong leadership and collaboration, the Nebraska DMV achieved full compliance with NR11 a month ahead of the federal deadline. Cheryl's strategic foresight, innovative thinking, and proactive planning—anchored by her consistent stakeholder engagement—played a pivotal role in Nebraska's success. This successful rollout kept commercial drivers safely on the road. The initiative also eliminated over 20 staff hours per week, enabling the DLS Division to redistribute workloads and streamline internal processes. Cheryl played a pivotal role in Nebraska DMV's highly successful implementation of the federally mandated electronic Drug and Alcohol Clearinghouse (DACH) queries for commercial driver license issuance.





Natural Resources

Elijah Kaufman

Elijah worked on updating the state floodplain model ordinance, making it more efficient and user friendly. He is currently focusing on the DART program in partnership with the Nebraska Floodplain and Stormwater Association. The purpose of this program is to assist communities handle floodplain management responsibilities after a natural disaster. Elijah is always friendly, kind, and consistent with helping customers do the right thing, Elijah's style of leadership emphasizes strategic planning and managing situations before they develop into more serious problems. Elijah is a great communicator; he has a step-by-step way of doing things which allows people to grasp information more effectively. He has shown this through multiple training courses he has done on floodplain management and presentations he has given at various conferences.



Natural Resources

Stefan Remund

Stefan eagerly takes on new responsibilities without hesitation, recently stepping into unfamiliar technical work and mastering it quickly. His efforts to modernize how the Republican Basin pumping data is reported show his commitment to continuous improvement and to making our work more efficient and effective. From proactively welcoming and training new staff to ensuring they feel supported and included, Stefan fosters a collaborative and encouraging environment. Communication is one of his greatest strengths. He is proactive in bringing issues or ideas, engages in thoughtful and solutions-oriented dialogue, and always makes time to listen and collaborate. Stefan represents our team with professionalism, initiative, and clarity. Through his innovation, teamwork, service-minded attitude, communication skills, and commitment to supporting and developing others, Stefan sets a high standard.



Office of the Chief Information Officer

Joe Beer

Joe was born and raised in Lincoln. His grandmother, Ruth Beer, served for many years as an accountant for the State of Nebraska. Prior to joining the Office of the CIO, Joe held various IT roles at Lincoln-based companies, spanning support and operations, web development, and project management. He's passionate about fostering collaboration, positivity, and leveraging technology to improve state services and deliver tangible results for our communities. Joe is an effective and efficient communicator and fosters an environment of inclusivity in meetings, brainstorming sessions, or just casual impromptu discussions on various topics. He collaborates across teams, values each and every contributor, and makes sure every single person feels seen and heard in every situation. He maintains a focus on keeping project activities in scope, on budget, and on time. Joe demonstrates fiscal responsibility, and ensures his projects have a clear path to success.

Officer of the Chief Information Officer Hailey Rogers

Hailey has been a powerhouse for the State of Nebraska serving for nearly 20 years. Starting out in DHHS, she climbed the ladder with determination and heart, eventually becoming the procurement manager for OCIO. Known for her sharp wit, warm personality, and unmatched knowledge of procurement, Hailey is the go-to expert for navigating the behind-the-scenes magic that keeps OCIO moving. Her leadership is top-tier—working hand-in-hand with every team, solving problems before they arise, and always looking for ways to make things better, faster, and more efficient. Hailey doesn't just manage processes—she transforms them. She leads with kindness, builds trust, and inspires those around her to aim higher. Simply put, Hailey is the kind of leader we all hope to become.



Public Service Commission Carrie Gans

Carrie serves as the assistant telecommunications director and has been with the Public Service Commission since 2019. Carrie originally started with the Commission as an analyst in the telecom/NUSF department. During her tenure, she has gradually assumed additional leadership and work responsibilities, and has handled them all admirably. Carrie accepts every challenge, and her determination, versatility, focus, and patience have been essential attributes in the administration of broadband grants and the development and regulation of telecommunications in Nebraska. Carrie does all of this with a friendly and personable demeanor, and with a kindness that never waivers. She is an incredible asset to the Commission.



Public Service Commission Robert Leigh

Robert joined the Commission in 2015. As senior grain inspector, he is looked to as a leader in all of the Commission's work ensuring the safety and integrity of grain warehouses and grain dealers in Nebraska. He is instrumental in ensuring that the Department's audits and inspections meet all regulatory standards, and his proactive approach to program development continues to enhance department performance. Robert's adaptability, problem-solving skills, and commitment to excellence make him a vital asset to the Commission.





Racing and Gaming Commission Nich Oberle

Nich joined the Nebraska Racing and Gaming Commission in April 2024 as a Gaming Compliance Representative II focused on sports betting following a distinguished career in the Army. Since joining the Commission, Nich has quickly become an invaluable team member, demonstrating a strong commitment to building and regulating sports betting. His proactive approach and dedication to continuous improvement are evident in his current pursuit of becoming a certified fraud examiner. Nich is known for his quiet yet impactful leadership style, always attentive to his teammates' needs and fostering an environment where teamwork and respect are prioritized. His thoughtful leadership and unwavering dedication have left a lasting impact across the organization.



Retirement Systems Elijah Spilker-Beed

Elijah began with the state in 2022, first as an SOS employee, and shortly thereafter as a retirement specialist I for NPERS. His exceptional contributions have elevated the refunds team into one of the most effective units in the agency. His unwavering work ethic, attention to detail, and high standards set the bar for excellence, inspiring those around him to achieve their best. Elijah's leadership is marked by his emotional intelligence, collaborative spirit, and skill in customer service, guiding colleagues and stakeholders toward resolution with care and professionalism. He is adept at anticipating issues, connecting seemingly unrelated details, and implementing solutions that benefit multiple teams. Known for his kindness, generosity, and humor, Elijah brings positivity and levity to even the most challenging situations, leaving a lasting impact on his peers and the agency as a whole.



Retirement Systems Annalisa Stevens

Annalisa has been with NPERS for five years. She exemplifies the very essence of leadership through her everyday actions and has been instrumental in shaping the refunds team into a model of excellence within the agency. With a unique blend of analytical skill, communication acumen, and problem-solving skills, she consistently lifts those around her while driving solutions to complex challenges. Known for her skill and anticipating challenges, she identifies and resolve issues that cross departments and teams, driving solutions with skill and precision. Her meticulous organizational skills, appetite for learning, and collaborative approach have increased efficiency and effectiveness throughout the agency. Beyond her professional expertise, Annalisa's generosity, understanding nature, and quick wit bring light to even the most difficult situations, making her an invaluable colleague and a deeply respected leader.

Revenue Rebecca Green

As a manager in the tax discovery unit, Rebecca has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication and expertise, particularly through her invaluable support of the investigations unit. She is always willing to be a resource and has forwarded the idea of cross training on the analysis protocol used by the tax discovery unit to bolster the skills and analysis of the Investigations unit. Rebecca shares her deep knowledge of tax regulations and discovery processes. Her ability to translate complex tax concepts into actionable insights for investigators has significantly enhanced the Investigations unit capabilities. She readily offers her time and expertise to answer questions, clarify nuances, and provide crucial guidance on tax-related inquiries. Her willingness to share her knowledge and her proactive approach to collaboration make her an indispensable asset.



Revenue Sharon Miller

Sharon's sense of duty to the Department of Revenue (DOR), taxpayers, and teammates alike, sets the example for her team. Sharon will analyze every tough situation to ensure the taxpayer receives the most accurate information possible. Likewise for her team, when they have questions, Sharon is able to find a way to deliver bad news to a recipient while maintaining trust and respect. Sharon works with her team so they, too, can provide the same level of service she provides. Sharon loves to share her knowledge and is often looked to as the subject matter expert of just about every business tax subject by her taxpayer assistance teammates and by teammates from other areas as well. Sharon enjoys learning and listens to differing opinions to broaden her knowledge base. In her free time, Sharon can be found reading and educating herself on issues that relate to her position at DOR. Her dedication is commendable.



State Auditor Dakota Christensen

Since starting as an intern in 2013, Dakota has worked hard on his path to becoming an audit manager. Dakota is a certified public accountant, a certified information systems auditor, and a certified fraud examiner. He has worked on multiple projects including county and local audits, annual State IT as part of the State's ACFR, tracking and coordinating audit filings for over 2,700+ political subdivisions, and investigated several fraud, waste, and abuse cases involving local governments. Dakota is a great example of what you look for in a manager. He is helpful, thoughtful, and a team player willing to take on any project. Dakota is dedicated to the Auditor's office and is always assisting staff in how to do their jobs better. With his expertise, he is able to speak regularly at conferences and meetings hosted by the Society of CPAs and others. In his free time, Dakota enjoys spending time with his family and coaching his son.





State Auditor Kelsey Lutz

Kelsey has been with the Auditor's office for 10 plus years. She received her Associate of Applied Science degree in Business Administration and her Associate in Arts from Southeast Community College. Kelsey is the office business manager; however, she assists with many different projects on a daily basis. After a brief hiatus to work for the Federal Government, Kelsey returned to the Auditor's office, and the staff could not be more thankful she came back. Kelsey's helpfulness, personality, and dependability make her a key component to any team. Kelsey has strong communication skills and is able to adapt to any situation that comes up. She does a great job of handling multiple projects and leading our administrative staff. In her free time, Kelsey loves to spoil her cat and spend time with her family.



State Patrol Shawna Backemeyer

Shawna serves as the lone research manager for the State Patrol's Criminal Identification Division. Shawna has taken leadership roles in numerous projects and upgrades within CID to greatly enhance productivity amongst teams and other state agencies. She was pivotal in passing legislation in 2025 related to the LB51 - FBI Compact Council. Passage of LB51 allows for greater data sharing and efficiencies between NSP and other states and the FBI. Shawna also assisted Nebraska DHHS with their entry into fingerprinting of non-criminal applicants for occupational licenses. Shawna is a subject matter expert for multiple team assignments in CID and always represents the Patrol and the State of Nebraska in a professional manner. Lastly Shawna is the primary contact inside CID for various projects and upgrades. She is critical to ensuring all teams within the Patrol's CID operate at a high level for the ultimate goal of ensuring thorough, accurate, and timely response of criminal histories for law enforcement, state agencies, and members of the public are 100% professionally completed.



State Patrol Austin Donner

Trooper Donner began his service with the Nebraska State Patrol in 2014. Since then, he has worked in the Carrier Enforcement Division, Patrol, and Special Operations Division as a police service dog handler. Trooper Donner has been a SWAT team member since 2018 and is currently an assistant team leader. Trooper Donner recently accepted a position as a NSP HDT (Hazardous Device Technician). He is awaiting his appointment to attend further HDT training in Anniston, AL. Trooper Donner is a licensed UAS (drone) pilot with his Part 104. Through his efforts as a K9 handler, SWAT member, and drone pilot, he has been key in the apprehension of over 100 felons in the recent past. Many of these wanted individuals were sought for violent crimes. Trooper Donner's work ethic, problem solving skills, teamwork, and desire for excellence have been key to his success.

State Patrol Kimberly Keniston

Kimberly has been a member of the IT Division/TraCS Team as an IT Business analyst/coordinator since 2019. Daily, Kimberly looks for ways to promote automation and standardized records to create more efficient processes within the Nebraska State Patrol and other criminal justice systems. She is the go-to person for TraCS for support, training, project management and improvement suggestions. TraCS helps to keep Nebraska a safe place for our officers and the citizens. She has taken an active leadership role in the many TraCS projects that coordinate and align resources between several divisions and other state agencies.



State Patrol Mike Maytum

Lt. Michael Maytum is the living example of honor, integrity and leadership. Mike came to the patrol in 2002 as a photographer and then attended basic patrol camp in 2005 and became a trooper. Mike was promoted through the ranks to Lieutenant where he now manages a 17 million dollar budget of State and Federal monies. He is nationally recognized as an expert in commercial motor vehicle enforcement and recognized by the trucking industry as a expert and a friend. Mike has championed highway safety and continuously puts others before himself.



State Treasurer Dawn Cadek

Dawn is a dependable hard working employee and an asset to treasury management. Whether she is doing a new task or reviewing documents, her attention to detail is reflected in the work that she does. Dawn is courteous and provides excellent customer service both in person or over the phone going above and beyond to assist customers with their questions or concerns. She is willing to research payment or deposits to ensure agencies receive their money into the accounting system in a timely manner. This minimizes the number of non-reconciled items on our bank statement keeping it clean and up to date. Dawn is willing to assist and learn when she can.





State Treasurer **Hilda Ramirez**

Hilda has always been a cornerstone of the treasury team, showing unwavering dedication and professionalism in everything she does. She treats every customer interaction with care, and when situations get tough, she doesn't just meet expectations—she finds a way to resolve the issue completely and leave the caller feeling heard and valued. Hilda's depth of experience makes her a trusted resource for her colleagues, who regularly seek her insight when facing difficult problems. Hilda's professionalism, problem-solving skills, and genuine care for both customers and teammates make her an essential part of our success.



Transportation **James Busing**

James is an invaluable member of the controller division, serving as the accounting revenue expert. He is the definitive subject matter expert on all revenue-related matters for NDOT, with exceptional expertise across all revenue sources. James goes above and beyond in researching factors that may impact revenue streams, ensuring the department remains informed and prepared. His strategic insight is especially evident in his recommendations for gas tax projections, which he approaches with a forward-thinking mindset to produce remarkably accurate forecasts that support sound fiscal planning. His initiative reflects dedication not only to his own work, but to the success of the team. Success-oriented and self-driven, James proactively stays informed on current events and policy developments that could affect NDOT's revenue sources. His professionalism, knowledge, and collaborative spirit make him an outstanding member of the team and a vital asset to the Department.



Transportation **Jason Dayton**

Jason has distinguished himself as a highly effective coach and team leader, with a strong focus on team development and creating a supportive, growth-oriented work environment. Through his thoughtful and proactive management style, he has transformed how the team operates—introducing innovative methods and empowering team members to expand their skills and take initiative. One of Jason's most impactful contributions has been developing an innovative method for producing floodplain maps and certifications, significantly streamlining the process. This approach not only increases efficiency but also provides opportunities for team members to build valuable GIS skills. As a result, engineers can focus on more technical aspects of their work, making it both more engaging and professionally rewarding. Beyond technical innovations, Jason stands out for his leadership and mentorship. Jason's contributions have measurably improved the team's operations, culture, and professional development.

Transportation Jennifer Hendrick

Jennifer leads with a clear commitment to teamwork and collaboration, consistently fostering an environment where every voice is heard and every contribution valued. Her management style enables her team to continuously improve and stay ahead of challenges. She manages with integrity, resilience, and an unwavering work ethic. Whether stepping in to support a project or navigating a complex issue with calm and clarity, Jennifer models the behavior and values that define effective leadership. Jennifer ensures everyone is working toward the shared goal of efficient, effective traffic management while maintaining a healthy work environment. She invests time in building relationships, recognizing individual strengths, and supporting professional growth for her team. With a customer service-focused approach, she prioritizes satisfaction whether engaging directly with other districts or guiding her own team. Jennifer's dedication to excellence, strong communication skills, and unwavering support for teamwork make her a truly exceptional leader.



Transportation Ethan Kearns

Ethan has consistently demonstrated leadership by example, making a significant positive impact on the team and NDOT as a whole. He leads numerous projects and never hesitates to train new employees on unfamiliar equipment. His drive and strong work ethic keep the team motivated and moving forward. Since stepping into the role of crew chief, Ethan has continued on his path as a great leader by mentoring newer employees, providing guidance, and supporting their future skills and career growth within NDOT. Anyone who has worked with Ethan knows he's a leader you can count on for guidance, support, and encouragement to succeed. He leads with quiet confidence and a steady presence that earns trust and inspires those around him. During a recent winter storm, when several new employees were overwhelmed by equipment procedures, Ethan personally led a hands-on training session. His direct involvement ensured everyone felt confident and prepared to handle the challenging conditions.



Transportation Tony Lange

Tony has overseen two large, highly visible projects in the Columbus area, excelling in communication with the community while collaborating effectively with contractors and city employees. Despite the usual concerns that come with large urban projects, Tony has handled them without escalation to the district office. These projects have also required additional public involvement duties, which Tony has managed with outstanding customer service skills. At the same time, he has done an excellent job training his employees. Most of his team were fairly new when they began, yet they are now performing exceptionally well on these complex projects. Recognizing his expertise, the agency sent a field engineer to work alongside Tony for additional training in managing complicated projects. Tony has surpassed expectations in leading his team, serving the community, and delivering excellent results.





Transportation

Terry Likens

Terry's calm, respectful leadership and genuine valuing of people has made an immediate impact on the Beatrice NDOT yard. He works diligently to fill all open positions, and develops and coaches inexperienced team members, ensuring they grow into their roles. During a March 2025 snowstorm, he followed an inexperienced employee as they plowed a rural highway, using the radio to provide tips on spreader operation and lane positioning to optimize effectiveness. His encouragement built the operator's confidence and motivation. He also provided step-by-step instruction on motor grader operations, assigning the task to someone with no prior experience and offered guidance and support. Beyond his crew, Terry met with local city officials to explore collaboration opportunities. As a result, NDOT and Beatrice now work together as a team on items of mutual interest. Terry's leadership, communication skills, and respect for his people have dramatically improved the competency, morale, and confidence of his employees while significantly reducing turnover.



Transportation

Marcella "Marcy" Meyer

Marcy consistently demonstrates outstanding dedication and commitment to the Division of Aeronautics' Navigation Aids Section. Throughout a prolonged period of understaffing, she has led by example, ensuring that all navigational aid and weather monitoring sites across Nebraska meet FAA standards without interruption. Her work ethic and positive attitude have remained steady despite multiple unsuccessful attempts to hire and train additional staff. A hallmark of Marcy's leadership is effective communication. Even though she is geographically remote from the central office, she maintains consistent, proactive dialogue with the aeronautics team. Equally important, she has built and sustained strong relationships with airport sponsors statewide, fostering trust in the agency's work and responsiveness. She also exemplifies customer service-focused excellence by developing flexible plans and multiple courses of action to keep critical equipment operational.



Transportation

Sarah Soula

Sarah demonstrates outstanding leadership and dedication to continuous improvement. She is committed both to public transit across Nebraska and to the people who carry its mission forward. She leads with clarity, compassion, and vision—always ensuring her team feels supported and valued. Sarah is approachable and personable, yet consistently direct and effective when setting expectations. She takes the time to coach and develop team members, helping them understand their roles and the bigger picture. This has been especially crucial as she has navigated numerous changes, providing reassurance, structure, and confidence that we will have a smooth flow once solid procedures and specific tasks are in place. In managing both state and federal transit funds, Sarah balances accountability with innovation. Her strategic thinking and forward-looking mindset strengthen the agency.

Transportation Janae Weston

The Right of Way Division faced several large capital improvement projects requiring significant public involvement, multiple residential and business relocations, and unconventional approaches to complete the work. Janae approached these challenges thoughtfully, recognizing that procuring a consultant was necessary to handle the volume of relocation work—an effort traditionally done internally. This required significant collaboration with the procurement team to make it happen. At public meetings, Janae often met one-on-one with landowners to explain project impacts and how NDOT would work with them. Many faced relocating their residence, business, or part of their operation. Janae clearly outlined the relocation process and remained committed to assisting affected landowners, even during intense discussions. Her ability to provide clarity and compassion earned the trust of many. Her leadership, clear communication, and dedication have been critical to the progress and success of these projects.



Transportation Mindy Whiteley

Mindy is a core component of District 5's leadership success and a strong contributor to the advancement of NDOT. She serves as a key resource for District 5's 145 employees, manages the business operations side of the district, and plays an active role in setting the district's direction. Her willingness to share her experience was again demonstrated when she volunteered to be part of NDOT's rollout of the new invoice processing method. After her involvement in the pilot program, Mindy joined a team that visited all eight districts to present the new process and answer technical questions. Mindy also volunteers her time to serve on the Board of Directors for the Leadership Scotts Bluff organization, which works to develop leaders within our community. This service is yet another example of her commitment to leadership development and continuous improvement. Mindy's dedication to her work, District 5 employees, and the growth of the district is appreciated. Her customer-oriented approach, combined with a focus on quality, makes her an invaluable member of the NDOT team.



Veterans Affairs Holden Armstrong

Holden has served as the communications director for the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs since November 2017. Highlights from his career at NDVA include coordination and execution of the "Celebrating 80 Years of Victory" World War II veteran recognition initiative, development of highly successful statewide public service announcement and recruitment advertising campaigns, and oversight of the agency's website redesign in 2020 which received several industry awards. Prior to his time at NDVA, Holden worked as a multimedia specialist at the Lincoln Children's Museum and marketing coordinator for Buffalo County Community Partners, a non-profit in Kearney. Holden and his wife, Shawnee, share a love of art, nature, and miniature pinschers. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, collaging, writing, drawing, filmmaking, photography, playing bass, and making music.





Veterans Affairs

Kare Heilbrun

Kare is the infection control/quality assurance nurse at Western Nebraska Veterans' Home. She consistently demonstrates strong collaboration, always ready to support colleagues, share insights, and contribute to collective success. Kare is a natural leader who leads by example. She doesn't just delegate; she actively participates, showcasing a remarkable work ethic and a genuine commitment to quality in every task. Kare fosters an environment of mutual respect and accountability, proactively addressing challenges and ensuring everyone feels valued. Her positive attitude, integrity, and unwavering dedication to shared goals are a constant source of inspiration, effectively setting a high standard for the entire team. What sets Kare apart is her commitment to improving members' quality of life. Her compassion, coupled with her friendly personality, has made her a favorite among staff and members.



Veterans Affairs

Ellen Keck

As facility pharmacist, Ellen demonstrates outstanding teamwork and collaboration. She provides day-to-day advice on things such as antibiotic recommendations to the medical director and managing timing and dosing for members who take particular medication. Ellen also embodies innovative and forward thinking, while constantly striving for improvement. At NVH, RNs have been able to administer many IV antibiotics in the facility as opposed to patients having to travel to the hospital daily to receive them. This is because when a member receives an order for an IV antibiotic, Ellen has been successful in searching for cost-effective ways for this to be done in-house. One way is for her to collaborate with the physician to have an IV antibiotic ordered to be given by our facility RNs as an IV push instead of infused. The members have expressed appreciation for being able to receive this important medication in the facility, as opposed to having to go to the hospital and receive outpatient care. She is positive and kind and is an excellent resource.



Veterans Affairs

Carrie Urwiller

Carrie was born in the Los Angeles area where she lived for about 27 years. She started her working career as an office secretary at the same school she graduated from. One year later, Carrie was hired at CalTech's NASA Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena as an administrative technician and later she became their office staff manager. Eight years later, Carrie and her family relocated to Nebraska, returning to her father's homestead. Carrie was hired in 2006 as an administrative technician at the Grand Island Veterans Home, which was relocated to Kearney in January 2019. During her 19 years with NDVA, Carrie worked directly with 10 administrators, became the supervisor of the receptionists, served as a timekeeper for administration and is the operator of the C-Cure Security System for the entire facility.

STATE OF NEBRASKA



Proclamation

WHEREAS,

The dedicated public servants of the State of Nebraska work hard every day to preserve the efficient and effective form of state government to which our citizens have grown accustomed; and

WHEREAS,

These same public servants are devoted, providing vital services to the citizens of our great state by carrying out their duties and responsibilities in an exemplary manner; and

WHEREAS,

Nebraska's competent and productive public servants consistently display their commitment to excellence, and it is important to recognize these workers for their professionalism and integrity.

NOW, THEREFORE,

I, Jim Pillen, Governor of the State of Nebraska, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM the Month of October 2025 as

NEBRASKA PUBLIC SERVANTS RECOGNITION MONTH

in Nebraska, and I do hereby urge all citizens to take due note of this observance.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and cause the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska to be affixed this Second Day of September, in the year of our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Five.



Attest:


Secretary of State


Governor

NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Service.

DEPT. OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES