



October 2026

R1 APEX Accelerator

Local Program Opens the Door to Government Contracting and Economic Growth



Left to right: Isaac Guerrero, R1 Director of Economic Development & Policy; Doug Finke, TopShot owner, Kevin Holdmann, TAC Rockford owner; and Brittany Allen, R1 APEX Accelerator Advisor spoke about the APEX Accelerator program at a press conference held on October 9 to announce the new R1 service.

Northern Illinois businesses looking to add government contracting to their portfolio now have a no-cost resource to guide them. R1's newly established APEX Accelerator program offers confidential advising, training, and education to help business owners pursue local, state, and federal governments contracts for goods and services

By opening new revenue streams, the program is built to strengthen not only individual businesses but also the region as a whole. This makes it a natural fit for R1.

"A common thread among R1's programs – the Economic Development District, Metropolitan Planning Organization, R1 Land Bank – is a commitment to help the region reach its full potential," said Brittany Allen, R1 APEX Accelerator Advisor. "APEX Accelerator is a natural extension of that mission – bringing people, resources, and opportunities together for the good of the region."

Schedule a Consultation

Brittany Allen

APEX Accelerator Advisor

Ballen@r1planning.org

815-319-4453

www.r1planning.org/apex



Services include:

- Understanding the contracting process
- Developing a capability statement
- Identifying and researching contract opportunities
- Completing applicable registrations and certifications
- Conducting market research and developing business strategies
- Preparing a bid and managing contracts if awarded

All services are provided at no cost and can be provided in-person or virtually. R1's APEX Accelerator serves Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, Ogle, and DeKalb counties.

In 2025, the federal government spent about \$793 billion on contracts for everything from cybersecurity software to consulting services to machine parts. Much of what the government buys directly aligns with the region's strengths: advanced manufacturing, transportation, distribution, and logistics. However, local businesses don't often pursue these opportunities, even when they know the benefits, because knowing where to start can feel overwhelming.

"Government contracting is like a whale hidden in plain sight", Brittany explained. "Small businesses often struggle to build a strong pipeline, yet one of their largest customers – the government – is right there in front of them. But like a whale, you can't see the whole thing up close. APEX Accelerator helps those businesses take a step back, adjust their perspective, and see where to begin."

Funding for APEX Accelerator is provided through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense and support from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

Walktober 2026

Green Commute Challenge Logged Over 300 Emission-Free Miles



The goal of R1's first-ever Walktober was for community members to replace at least one car trip. That's it.

Rockford area residents enthusiastically took up the challenge. From October 5-9, 52 Rockford region residents (including 17 R1 staff) logged more than 300 miles walking, biking, taking public transit, or carpooling instead of driving.

R1 awarded prizes at random to participants who participated all five days or uploaded a photo of their commute. Donated prizes were a four-pack of IceHogs tickets; gift cards to Rockford Roasting Company, Kegel's Bicycle Shop, and The Olympic Tavern; and a Comprehensive Community Solutions gift basket.

"Our main goal with Walktober was to nudge the region into thinking practically about alternative modes of travel. Ideally, this week inspired at least one person to start a new habit," said Tim Verbeke, Director of Planning.

R1 also sought feedback on how infrastructure helps or hinders alternative travel. R1 asked registered participants about their habits and opinions regarding green commuting and found:

- **Current Mode of Transportation:** Driving to work (42%), followed by carpooling (25%).
- **Average Commute:** 4-5 miles.
- **Motivation to Participate:** Improving health (65%), helping the environment (62%), saving money (54%), and boosting team spirit (52%).
- **Barriers to a Green Commute:** Distance, bus schedules, infrastructure safety and availability, and weather.

R1 plans to make this an annual event, with expanded programming for 2027. See the [Walktober website](#) for a video of prize winners, list of sponsors, and other program details.



Open for Public Comment

Click on the survey title to participate



[Housing Coordination Plan](#)

How can northern Illinois preserve and grow its available housing? This plan lays out strategies paired with data insights and practical tools so municipal leaders can develop in a way that supports their communities' needs.



[EPA Brownfield Coalition Grant](#)

R1 can assist with costs for conducting environmental assessments and developing cleanup plans for Boone and Winnebago County brownfield sites. Submit a property you think may be eligible for brownfield assessment at the link above.

Earthrise 815

Sustainability Conference to Discuss Climate Action Plan Strategies



To register, visit <https://earthrise815.com>.

Earthrise815 Sustainability Action Conference

Friday, November 6

8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Embassy Suites, 416 South Main St., Rockford

Sustain Rockford's Earthwise 815 conference will be full of practical, sustainable strategies to strengthen businesses, build resilient communities, and create lasting environmental impact.

Themes and breakout sessions are all inspired by R1's Climate Action Plan for the Rockford region.

SPEAKERS

Bill McKibben - author, founder of Third Act and 350.org

Doug Scott - chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission

Mark Charles - author, environmental stewardship speaker

Isaac Guerrero - R1 Director of Economic Development & Policy

BREAKOUT SESSION TOPICS INCLUDE

Waste Reduction - Personal and Community

Sustainable Businesses and Agriculture

Redesigning the Built Environment

Energy Needs

Protecting Our Air, Water, and Natural Lands

Social Equity

Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board Grants WCCMHB Accepting Proposals for 2027-2030 Program Funding



The Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board currently funds 37 core programs, covering areas like youth social-emotional development, the Mobile-Integrated Health program, a physician fellowship in addiction medicine, and traditional counseling/case management. Community members learn about all 37 supported programs at the annual Building Bridges event, shown here.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Renewal programs Applications due November 30, 5 pm

New programs Abstracts due October 27, 5 pm
Applications open December 3, 8 am
Applications close January 7, 5pm

The Winnebago County Community Mental Health Board (WCCMHB) is now accepting proposals for mental health and substance use services under its next round of funding.

Service providers in Winnebago County, both Core Program grant recipients and new applicants, may be eligible.

WCCMHB staff will host two Zoom Q&A sessions for applicants. Click on the date below to register for that session. They will also be recorded and posted to the WCCMHB YouTube page.

- [October 15, 4:00 pm - 4:30 pm](#)
- [October 22, 11:30 am - 12:00 pm](#)

The WCCMHB has \$85 million available to be distributed over three years: \$75 million for programming and \$10 million for one-time capital projects. Organizations may apply for both. Requirements for each are outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Award recipients will be announced at the March 2027 WCCMHB meeting.

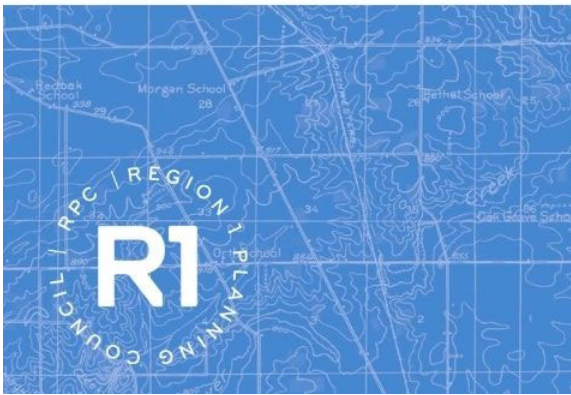
View the NOFO and other application documents at <https://r1planning.org/community-impact/wccmhb/wccmhb-funding-resources/>.



Interested in joining our team? See all open positions at r1planning.org/careers.

Riley Osterberg

Land Use Planner



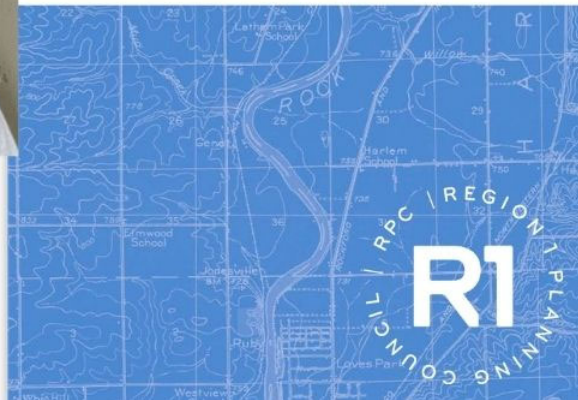
Riley Osterberg joins R1 as a Land Use Planner. She has bachelor's degrees in Environmental Studies and History and a master's degree in Urban Planning, all from the University of Kansas. At R1, she will work on sustainable land use projects; in particular how they merge with R1's transportation and housing projects.



Sewly Khatun

Community Impact Specialist

.....

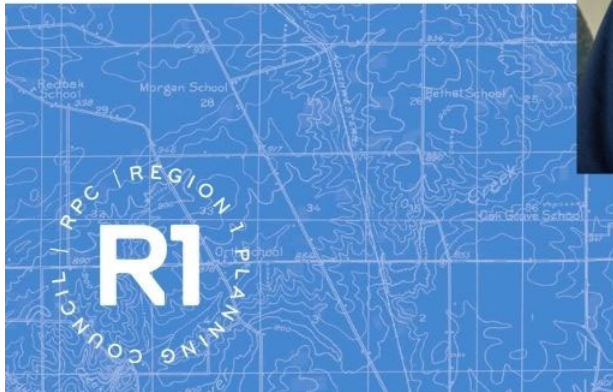


Sewly Khatun joins R1 as a Community Impact Specialist. She has a master's degree in Project Management from Missouri State University and a Master of Public Health degree from North South University. She has over 10 years of experience in both the United States and abroad with public health, project and program management, partnership management, and program evaluation. At R1, she will support community engagement, research, and other grant-funded initiatives for the community impact team.

Tommy Creuzer

Economics Intern

.....



Tommy Creuzer joins R1 as an Economics Intern. He has an Associate's degree from Highland Community College and is a senior at Rockford University, majoring in Financial Economics. His studies include micro and macro economics, business, finance, and statistics. At R1, he will support projects for the data and planning teams with his economics expertise.

Copyright © 2026 R1 Planning Council, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

127 N. Wyman St., Suite 101, Rockford, IL 61101

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).



