The Economic Alliance
Board Meeting
May 27, 2026
Via Zoom

Attending Board Members:

Maria Lassila, 1st Chairman, Tourism Rep. Omak Chamber
Anthony Popelier, 1st Vice Chair Reman & Reload, North Co. #2
Sarah Jo Lightner, Methow Arts, 2nd Vice Chair., Arts Comm Rep
Anna Dalbey, Past Chairman, So. Co. #2, Keller Williams Realty
Kurt Danison, Secretary, City Rep. #1, City Planner
Andy Bertapalle, At-Large #1, Chief Admin Mid Valley Hosp
Brent Timm, Tonasket Chamber & TranGO Vacant, North Co. #1
Jon Brown, Methow Valley #1, Twisp Works
Monica Garza Acevedo, WorkSource, At-Large #3
Steve Quick, Central #2 Okanogan School Super
Cindy Simpson, Finance Rep, WA Federal Bank
Rocklyn Culp, Town of Winthrop, Planner
Beth Stroshane, Applied Bldg Infor, At-Large #4
Rob Gillespie for Lisa Bauer, City Rep., City of Okanogan

Absent Board Members:

Nick Timm, County Commissioners Rep., Rep. #1, Treasurer
Jord Wilson, South County #1, City of Pateros
Jordan Ruiz, NNDF, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #2
Lanie Johns, Ok Co Commissioners Rep., Ck of the Brd Co Rep #2
Vacant - At Large #5
Rikki Whipple, Nespelem/Coulee Dam Area #1, NNDF
Crystal Gage, Confluence Heath, Central Co. Area #1
Cal Goolsby, WVC, At Large #A2
William Marchand, CCT Planning
Vacant -CTFC Representative

Guests/Staff:

Roni Holder-Diefenbach, Ex. Director, Economic Alliance
Leonel Marcial, Business Outreach Specialist, Economic Alliance
Breanna Sollender, Comm/Outreach Specialist, Economic Alliance
Jessica McCarthy, Okanogan Co. PUD
Mason Duke, E. Dev. Specialist, Economic Alliance
Carolyn Davis, Project Assistant, Economic Alliance
Staci Nelson, Partners for Rural Washington

Maria Lassila, Chairman called the meeting to order and asked everyone to sign into the chat to introduce themselves.

Agenda: No conflicts with the agenda items and no changes to the agenda.

Consent Agenda: Minutes from April 22, 2026, were emailed out and financials as of May 20, 2026, were sent. Andy Bertapelle made a motion to approve the minutes as presented and the financials as of May 22, 2026, as presented. Brent Timm seconded. Motion passed with no one opposed or abstained.

Presentation:

Staci Nelson with Partners for Rural Washington gave an update on the grant writing for Okanogan County's Infrastructure Projects. While they operate under the name Partners for Rural Washington, they are the official Rural Development Council for Washington State. Partners for Rural Washington was founded in 2015 as a 501(c)3. They are flexible in the type of support they offer and target. PRWA is a non-profit organization led by representatives from all levels of government, community and regional nonprofit organizations and the private sector. They endeavor to create positive climates for the advancement of policy issues, collaboration, innovation, best practices, attraction of resources – financial and other – and build rural leadership capacity in Washington. They work with other nonprofit organizations, community leaders, state agencies and organizations, private business and industry and locally elected public officials to improve the quality of rural life in our state. They also work with town/city clerks to provide training and training for city and town leaders. They also represent rural interests to state and federal elected officials.

They have been working with Okanogan County's Infrastructure Projects to do research and grant writing. There were 23 projects on the list, and they have met with 11 entities and identified 3 new projects (Brewster Opportunity Zone, TwispWorks Farm to Table, and Okanogan County Narcotics Task Force). No applications have been submitted yet. Shared with Methow businesses about disaster funding because of the flooding. Roni Holder-Diefenbach stated that she is currently working with the county commissioners to declare a disaster because of the weather / drought. Staci Nelson can be reached at 509 995-0716. Roni Holder-Diefenbach now sits on the Partners for Rural Washington Board.

Motions

North Valley #1 Vacant Position: Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the new Executive Director of Twisp Works, Jon Brown, would be taking Patrick Law's position on the Economic Alliance Board. She asked Mr. Brown to speak about why he is interested in being on this Board. Jon Brown stated that he was formerly the Executive Director at the Loup Loup for three years. He owned the Arrow Leaf Bistro and is currently the Executive Director at Twisp Works. He is excited to work with the Economic Alliance as a Methow Valley Representative. Brent Timm moved to seat Jon Brown as the #1 representative of the Methow Valley, replacing Patrick Law. Andy Bertapalle seconded. Motion passed with no one opposed or abstained.

Reports

Executive Director Report: (see attachment #1) Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that May was a short month for her as she has been out sick and then was on vacation. NC Washington Drug Task Force, who lost a significant funding source this year, are looking for grant opportunities to help keep them running. We have a meeting scheduled on June 2nd with the BOCC to discuss this more as they are the task force's fiscal agent. Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that she completed an audit with the Department of Commerce and received a "No Findings" and they are happy with the way we are doing things. We didn't receive the cuts that were expected from the DOC. She reported that she met with Twisp and Winthrop about the late opening of the North Cascades Highway. Roni Holder-Diefenbach sent emails to all our legislators and spoke to a representative about the SBA Disaster Programs. Mason Duke also attended a meeting at the Winthrop Barn with the Department of Transportation about the late opening of the NC Highway. The Economic Alliance has been sharing information about the EIDL program, attending meetings with businesses, individuals, and nonprofits about this program and others that they might be eligible.

The County's Public Works Department will be doing the NEPA for the Loomis Fire District for the CDBG grant.

Infrastructure Committee: A meeting is scheduled with the county commissioners on July 7 to decide how much funding will be available to allocate to projects from the Infrastructure Fund. The prioritization process will open on August 26, 2026, for funding for 2027. Project should re-apply to be ranked.

Business Education/Outreach: Mason Duke reported that there has been a focus on the Methow Valley and businesses that are struggling because of the pass closure. He was asked to review CTE programs from schools across the county. There is also an upcoming workshop on Access to Capital workshop scheduled for June 9th.

Leonel Marcial reported he is working with businesses and they are struggling. Letting them know that the Economic Alliance is available to assist. Orchardists and cattle operations are also struggling. He also attended several chamber meetings to share information about the Economic Alliance.

Breanna Sollender reported she reported in May's newsletter that Mason Duke & Leonel Marcial both received their Associate Advisor Certificates. She also attended the Conservation District event at the Omak Park and was able to talk with people about the services of the Economic Alliance. If anyone has any information they would like to share, please get in touch with her.

Discussion
Board Member Recruitment: Still have two positions on the Board that are vacant. The At-Large Position and the CTFC.

Port District: No updates.

Technical Training & Education Committee: Sarah Jo Lightner reported that the committee did meet last week and had two speakers. Dr. Christoph gave a report on the Omak School District and that CTE programs are an area of focus. He also asked what jobs the students should prepare for and it helps to bring presenters into the classroom or to do field trips with students. The Omak School District recently sent eight students to Nationals for the FBLA. Need to expand the job shadowing program. Currently CTE Program offerings are in Agriculture, Automotive, Business/Marketing, Family and Consumer Science, Health & Science, Skilled and Technical Sciences.

Nikki Medved with the North Central Educational Service District also spoke to the Committee and stated that she is always looking for new partners. Making connections, real life experiences, job shadowing and internships are very important and helpful. Some kids like to be paid, but majority just like the experience. The Methow School has a great program. Sarah suggested that businesses offer a scholarship program for school credit for work site learning.

Broadband – Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that the next meeting is scheduled for June 26 and they are going to start doing quarterly meeting instead of monthly. We have been seeing a lot of connections happening and there will be a Broad Band "lighting" ceremony to celebrate this success.

Contract/Grant Updates 2026
Roni Holder-Diefenbach reported that we now have a signed contract with SBDC and were able to submit the first quarter billing. She is looking at working with the Port of Pasco advisor to provide additional business counseling. We might not meet all requirements of this contract, since we don't have an in-house advisor.

We have also submitted a billing and report for the first quarter for the USDA contract.

Other Business/News/Member Updates
Those in attendance provided updates about what is happening in their communities or from their organizations.

Meeting adjourned, 12:15 p.m.

Next meeting is scheduled for June 24, at 11:00 a.m. in person at the county commissioners hearing room.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Davis

Roni Holder-Diefenbach Executive Director

Attachment #1

ECONOMIC ALLIANCE
Executive Director Report

May 2026

May has been a short month for me, as I have been out sick or on vacation for a lot of it. Despite that, we have had a lot going on at the Economic Alliance.

This month we have been working with Partners for Rural Washington on identifying projects through the Evergreen Manufacturing program and Opportunity Zones program to see if we had any interest from organizations or communities to apply for them. We also met with the NC Washington Drug Task force who lost a significant funding source this year, so they are looking for grant opportunities to help keep them running. We have a mtg scheduled on June 2nd with the BOCC to discuss this more as they are the task forces Fiscal Agent.

In early May, I met with Diana Divens who is our grant compliance officer at the Department of Commerce ADO program for our annual audit. We passed with flying colors, and she was very happy with the way we are doing things. After the audit, we discussed the ADO cuts, and how we are going to be directly impacted which is basically not at all, and we went over some of the new requirements for reporting that they will be asking us to do in June.

I also went to Twisp and met with several businesses on Glover Street who have been impacted by the construction and learned that many of them were also very concerned about the Highway 20 closure that was extended into July. This is during their busy time of year, and many are already feeling the impacts and seeing cancellations at resorts and no foot traffic into their stores. I reached out to Janie Sacco from the SBA and we talked about the SBA Disaster programs that Okanogan County is already eligible for. She gave us several resources for our businesses to apply for and offered to do training for us in the future. We have been sharing and attending meetings to provide information to businesses, individuals and nonprofits about this program and others that they are eligible for.

Our contract with PRWA is in progress, they have reached out to all our Infrastructure projects that were prioritized in the last cycle to determine their need for assistance. The USDA RBDG program just rolled out and has a due date in June. We shared the program with those who could be eligible or have projects that could be funded through this program.

This month I continued to work with the County and Loomis Fire District on the CDBG Grant. I also will be attending the CERB Board meeting virtually and meeting with our USDA contract manager to go over the new billing process they have for the RBDG program.

Community Economic Revitalization Board
Washington Economic Development Association
Partners for Rural Washington
CCT& Okanogan County BAT