

State of Small Business Symposium

2026
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Cleveland, OH



Brian Voerding
President
Initiative Foundation

Brian is the president of the Initiative Foundation, which invests in the people and places of Central Minnesota to build thriving economies, vibrant communities, and a shared culture of generosity. The Foundation is a rural development and civic hub providing a rich toolbox of resources for the region to imagine, decide on, and build bold solutions and shape communities where everyone prospers, participates and belongs. The

Foundation operates one of the largest and oldest CDFIs in rural Minnesota, delivering \$5-\$7 million in loans annually and training hundreds of underserved entrepreneurs across race, place and class. The Foundation supports community wealth-building and local ownership across a variety of strategies, including grants, loans and charitable funds; free and low-cost programs and trainings ranging from childcare to clean energy; homegrown programs like Thriving Communities, bringing residents together across divides to engage and invest in their small towns; and the Initiators Fellowship, which melds a two-year cohort program and ecosystem capacity-building to develop successful social enterprises across rural Minnesota.

Prior to joining the Foundation in 2021, Brian founded and led a community-building nonprofit focused on creating access, voice and power for rural people, and was a longtime daily newspaper editor. He is a lifelong Minnesotan who was born in the region the Foundation serves, loves outdoor adventures, and says yes to way too many volunteer opportunities.