

**ESS Finance Subcommittee  
Web Conference Meeting  
February 5, 2026**

**Attendance**

**Subcommittee Members**

Stacie Herridge, Story County Recorder  
Melissa Bahnsen, Cedar County Recorder  
Sheri Jones, Jones County Recorder

Kelly Spees, Jefferson County Recorder  
Geraldyn Greer, Shelby County Recorder  
Amy Assink, Floyd County Recorder

**Other Participants**

Natalie Steffener, Des Moines County Recorder  
Jamie Stargell, Adams County Recorder  
Josie Fettkether, Clayton County Recorder

Lori Murphy, Mills County Recorder  
Erin Canfield, Boone County Recorder  
Nancy Booten, Lee County Recorder

Phil Dunshee, Iowa Land Records  
Lisa Long, Iowa Land Records

Kristen Delaney-Cole, Iowa Land Records  
Samantha McMahon, Iowa Land Records

**Welcome**

A meeting of the ESS Finance Subcommittee was held via web conference. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM.

**Meeting Summary**

The Finance Subcommittee reviewed the January 8, 2026, meeting summary. Geraldyn Greer made a motion to approve the summary of the meeting. Sheri Jones seconded, and the motion was approved.

**Accounts Receivable Update**

The Account Manager presented the accounts receivable report to the Finance Subcommittee, as of January 31, 2026. The report consisted of a majority of county invoices for the calendar year 2026 maintenance fees. It was reported that many payments had been received since the report had been prepared. Additionally, a late Fund 255 bill was highlighted along with a receivable from Fuerste Law, due to a positive pay action during the month.

**February Summary of January ESS Payments**

The Accounting Coordinator presented the accounts payable expenses to the Subcommittee. Key points covered several invoices for service provider maintenance fees: Tyler Technologies, Cott, and DEVNET. Additionally, a purchase from Amazon included a monitor cord for one of the ESS Developers. A 25% retainer to Visionary for the ESS website refresh was also highlighted. All additional items were normal month-to-month expenses.

A review of recent credit card expenditures was provided. Several purchases from Amazon were shown during the evaluation. Most of the charges were related to equipment needs for the newly hired third ESS Developer. Additionally, a computer desk and chair were purchased that were used for training the new developer. It was noted that desk and chair will be used when the team moves to a new location in a couple of months, as all new office furniture will be needed. The last Amazon charge on the account was accidental, and the charge has since been reimbursed to ESS.

Further review highlighted several expenses from Indeed and LinkedIn relating to the Executive Director job posting on the respective sites. The job postings have since been closed and interviews are underway. The annual Dropbox and Intuit subscriptions were also renewed during the month. Additionally, the tax refund from Survey Monkey was received during the month; the original charge included taxes in November 2025.

It was also noted that the membership in the Iowa Mortgage Association was renewed. The expense was approved in the November ESS meetings. Two registrations for the spring PRIA conference were covered. One was an in-person registration for the ESS Project Manager and one for the ESS Account manager, virtual.

A motion to approve the February summary of January ESS payments was made by Melissa Bahnsen, with Amy Assink seconding. The motion was approved.

### **February Fund 255 Reimbursement Invoice**

The Subcommittee reviewed the Fund 255 reimbursement invoice for February 2026. The invoice was based on two payroll expenses in January. The amount of the reimbursement request was \$45,544.89. The funds from the F255 account come from the one-dollar fee that is attached to every recorded document in Iowa.

Stacie Herridge made a motion to approve the February reimbursement invoice to the State Treasurer. GERALYN GREER seconded. The motion was approved.

### **December, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, and YTD 2025 Financial Reports**

#### **December 2025 Financial Reports**

The Subcommittee reviewed the financial reports for December 2025. Notably, the Bankers Trust settlement account opened and closed with a balance of \$0. The Bankers Trust money market account opened with a \$1,572,297.02 beginning balance and ended at \$1,325,737.12. Both accounts were successfully reconciled.

The Profit & Loss (P&L) statement for December showed ESS's budgeted income of \$174,974.49 against budgeted expenses of \$101,952.82, resulting in a budgeted net income of \$73,021.67. The revolving income for the period was \$4,275,304.70, contributing to a gross income of \$4,450,279.19. Revolving expenses were \$4,269,827.43, with total expenditures of \$4,394,517.80. The total net income for December 2025 came in at \$55,761.39.

A comparison of December 2024 to December 2025 financials was provided to the Subcommittee. The report detailed each account resulting in an overall 13.3% increase in budgeted income for the period. Total budgeted expenses decreased by 15% from the previous year, resulting in a total increase in net income of 111.9% or \$38,555.14.

The discussion of income-related items covered the Bankers Trust money market account interest. The earnings have decreased due to rate cuts over the last several months but have increased compared to the year prior. POS fee income and E-Submission service fee income have increased 14.4% and 14.9%, respectively, compared to December 2024. Additionally, the change in the MOU account as well as the OD Service Fees was a result of the activity in 2024, both services have ceased in 2025. The miscellaneous income during the month was due to the sale of a retired computer monitor. Also noted was the increase in Fund 255 income.

The discussion of expense-related items included a decrease in human resource fees. Expenditures relating to the recent computer updates for the ESS Admin Team were pointed out. In conjunction with the computer equipment, the office tech support for the conversion was highlighted. Additionally, the Accusoft-PRIZM expense was moved to the budget during December 2024, where in 2025 the expense was shown earlier in the year. Several other expenses were highlighted due to year end audit adjusting entries. It was noted that due to the 2024 audit adjusting entries, the numbers were slightly skewed.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2025 Financial Reports**

The Profit & Loss (P&L) statement for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2025 showed ESS's budgeted income of \$492,649.82 against budgeted expenses of \$326,087.85, resulting in a budgeted net income of \$166,561.97. The revolving income for the period was \$10,813,117.75, contributing to a gross income of \$11,305,767.57. Revolving expenses were \$10,802,017.44, with total expenditures of \$11,196,839.80. The total net income for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2025 came in at \$108,927.77.

#### **YTD 2025 Financial Reports**

The Profit & Loss (P&L) statement for CY 2025 showed ESS's budgeted income of \$2,010,901.06 against budgeted expenses of \$1,580,578.61, resulting in budgeted net income of \$430,322.45. The revolving income for the period was \$41,430,883.32, contributing to a gross income of \$43,441,784.38. Revolving expenses were \$41,424,010.13, with total expenditures of \$43,294,940.91. The total net income for CY 2025 came in at \$146,843.47.

A comparison of CY 2024 to CY 2025 financials was provided to the Subcommittee. The report compared each account resulting in an overall 10.3% increase in budgeted income for the period. Total budgeted expenses decreased by 8.6%, from the previous year, resulting in a total increase in net income of 357.3% or \$336,214.56. The Subcommittee was reminded that due to 2024 audit adjusting entries being included and because the 2025 audit entries were not yet entered, the numbers were slightly skewed.

The Balance Sheet indicated total assets and liabilities at \$2,925,833.32, with \$778,422.58 specifically residing in the Bankers Trust settlement account and \$1,325,737.12 in the Bankers Trust money market account. It is important to note, given accrual-based accounting, the balance sheet figures for the Bankers Trust settlement account are higher than the actual bank account balance. The settlement account amount on the Balance Sheet represents unreconciled transactions in the ESS accounting software, as of December 31, 2025.

The journal entries made during the month of December were provided to the ESS Finance Subcommittee. Many of the entries were related to the movement of money in and out of the Bankers Trust settlement and money market accounts. The report also detailed the monthly depreciation expense for developed software. Additionally, an entry making adjustments to the reserve accounts was noted and explained. The increases to a couple of the reserve accounts were also observed. These increases were approved in the ESS meetings in November, to occur at the end of 2025.

The beginning balance of the credit card account in December was \$4,590.45, and the ending balance came in at \$7,505.76. The account was reconciled successfully.

Regarding the Fund 255 account for December, the account opened with a balance of \$171,270.85 and closed at \$171,268.81. This was consistent with the February reimbursement invoice, approved earlier in the meeting.

A question related to the bad payment fees covered in the Profit & Loss statements, during the year. It was explained that when ESS is charged back or receives a returned payment, that ESS is charged a \$35 fee. The charge did increase from \$30 to \$35 at the end of 2024. ESS is passing that charge onto the customer. An additional question relating to how ESS could mitigate that risk was asked. Due to the circumstances relating to these charges, via positive pay, account closure, chargebacks, or NSF payments, there is nothing further that the ESS team can do to try and stop them from happening. Communication with the customer does occur quickly and payments are collected in a timely manner. There has not been any bad debt written off for a very long time.

A motion was made by Sheri Jones to approve the December, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, and YTD 2025 financial reports, as presented. Kelly Spees seconded, and the motion was approved.

### **CY 2026 Budget Amendment**

The Project Manager presented the updated CY 2026 Budget Amendment, with current January numbers. Although no major changes in projections are foreseen, a few points were made. The government relations account for January was over the budgeted amount, due to the billing cycle of The Rafferty Group, a month behind. The contract reduces the amount for 2026. Additionally, the IMA membership was renewed early. The JetBrains account was also highlighted. Due to the hiring of an additional ESS Developer, the expense increased to support the new team member. Discussions are ongoing with the development team to possibly renew the subscription to include additional credits for certain services.

Overall, income is expected to increase by \$4,982.17, mostly due to the F255 income received during January. Expenses for the year are expected to decrease for the year by \$9667.59, after January actuals were inserted. This is primarily related to prior expectations of having a full-time third developer during the whole month of January. Net income for the year is increased by \$14,649.76, over prior projections.

A motion to approve the CY 2026 budget amendment was made by Melissa Bahnsen, with Stacie Herridge seconding. The motion was approved.

### **Finance Procedures Review**

Last year a working group was established by the Iowa County Recorders' Association to review both the 28E agreement and the ESS Policies and Procedures. A few topics were discussed about the finance packet contents and procedures relating to the ESS budget. The Subcommittee (and the ESS Coordinating Committee) were asked to review several possible changes to Policies and Procedures and to consider making other recommendations regarding finance procedures. Some comments were received from Subcommittee members, and some options were suggested by the ESS Project Manager.

Based on the input received and various informal discussions, a draft set of amendments was prepared for review. Some notable adjustments included a provision that requires the ESS Coordinating Committee to hold an organization meeting each January to elect officers. The ESS Secretary/Treasurer and ICRA Treasurer would also become standing members of the Finance Subcommittee.

Annual designations of subcommittee chairs and budget-related language were also noted in the draft presented for discussion. The Subcommittee members were asked in the January ESS Finance Subcommittee meeting to distribute the memo along with the Policy and Procedures draft to their respective districts for comment. The consensus was that with upcoming changes in legislation and a new ESS Executive Director starting this spring, that the proposed adjustments would clean the procedures up and could be brought back to the table later, if needed.

Melissa Bahnsen made a motion to approve the changes to the ESS Policies and Procedures and recommend them for adoption by the ESS Coordinating Committee. Sheri Jones seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

### **ESS Financial and Strategic Review**

#### **January Metrics Review**

E-Submission activity for January 2026 was reported to have come in just under the month of January high-point in 2021. Historically, a decline in submissions for January is a normal trend from year-to-year, with February usually being the lowest recording month and then increasing with the months that follow.

#### **Engagement Letter - Denman CPA LLP**

It was reported that ESS did receive the audit engagement letter from Denman CPA LLP. The engagement letter was included in the packet for review. The letter will be brought to the ESS Coordinating Committee at their meeting later in the month for approval. After the ESS Coordinating Committee approves the engagement letter a date can be set for the 2025 audit.

#### **Cost Sharing Credits and Maintenance Invoices**

The Accounting Coordinator provided an update on the cost sharing credits and maintenance invoices. The invoices were sent out to each participating county on January 20, 2026, for calendar year 2026. It was noted that the counties have until July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026, to pay the invoices.

A message of gratitude to the counties that are sharing in this expense was given. The service providers provide an important service to keep everything running smoothly. It was reminded that if legislation does approve a fee increase that ESS intends to assume 100% of the maintenance fees, where the counties would not be billed to help support the service providers that participate.

#### **WordPress**

The ESS Coordinating Committee authorized a contract with a local company called Visionary. The company will be updating the WordPress pages of the Iowa Land Records website, which is the front door to all Iowa Land Records applications. An advance payment has been made as they will audit the existing pages of the site. The work will continue this spring, and reserve funds have been identified to be used for the update. Updates will be given in future meetings as the work continues.

### **Software Developer and Executive Director**

The Project Manager updated the Subcommittee on the recent Software Developer and Executive Director search. The new Software Developer started approximately two weeks ago and is transitioning well. An introduction at a future meeting will be planned. Additionally, ESS received over 150 applications for the ESS Executive Director position. The Search Committee, comprised of elected ESS leadership, has been holding interviews. Second-round interviews are being planned for the following week.

The ESS Coordinating Committee Chair gave an update on the process. The original round of interviews included 7 candidates. The committee is advancing three for face-to-face interviews. There will be two parts to the second interview, where the ESS team will do the initial first half of the interview with the ESS Search Committee executing the second half. It was noted that there were a lot of good candidates and confidence that the right advancing candidates were successfully chosen was expressed.

### **ESS Office Relocation Review**

The ESS team has been actively searching for new office space in the Des Moines metro. A preliminary review of around forty properties of potential locations was conducted, with ten offices selected for site visits. The team has selected three locations from that initial ten for further analysis and comparison.

The parameters of the search have included roughly 1,500 to 2,000 square feet, with at least three private offices. Additionally, the western suburbs of the metro were a key element in the search. The preference expressed has been for offices that are already configured, to prevent having to invest additional resources in the buildout of the interior. After the site reviews are completed, communication with the leadership, particularly at the February 19th meeting, will be conducted. An update will be given at the March Finance Subcommittee meeting.

### **Notification System RFQ**

During the January ESS Coordinating meeting the Project Manager was directed ESS to move forward with the development of a plan for implementing a notification system in conjunction with the Iowa Land Records system. The official RFQ was provided in the packet, for review. The request for quote has been published and the RFQ has been provided to qualified service providers. The Q&A period has begun. Proposals will be due by February 17, 2026.

The design of what the notification system would look like was included in Section 4.3 of the document. That is where the description about what the notification system is, and how it would work. The notification system would work in parallel with the Iowa Land Records Search application. The system is being designed to utilize some of the existing technology that the ILR website is already using.

Communication with qualified service providers has included the technical set of skills needed in order to complete the specified work. Descriptions of what the system would look like have also been provided. The RFQ was written in a way to accept proposals, and the expectation is that a vendor will be chosen to assist in the creation of the system. To fund the development of the system resources have been identified in the software development and maintenance reserve account. The intention would be to use those resources to pay for the development work, with a target date for its completion by the end of June.

A question arose relating to people who may need assistance with the sign-up for the system or potentially needing help with using the notification system. The discussion concluded with assurance that the ESS team would be willing to help individuals as they needed assistance. Additionally, once the system is fully running ESS will create videos for reference with step-by-step instructions on how to use the system.

### **POS System**

The Accounting Coordinator provided an update on the POS system and USAePay payment processing. Regarding the POS system, at the beginning of the year several machines started reporting a day later than the other county machines. Normally, transactions are received the following day for payment but were delayed for a day. This issue was caused by the machines' date changing to be an hour behind. Those county machines have since been updated. ESS is continuing to closely monitor the situation, and communication will take place if any other issues come about.

ESS uses USAePay primarily for the E-Submission payment system. During the last few months of 2025 several "Temporarily unable to process transaction - Please try again shortly" errors occurred in both ACH and CC transactions. Interaction with the USAePay team was difficult, with some instances of several days in between responses. During that time the Professional Solutions team was brought into the conversation. When the error occurred, the payment wouldn't fully settle for payment and in turn our system would attempt to charge the account the following day. However, the original transaction would settle at a later time, and the customer would then be charged twice. Additionally, in some cases the customer would be double charged, and the county would be paid twice. The issue has since been resolved. However, the outcome from the experience and lack of communication from the USAePay team has resulted in a representative from Professional Solutions and the ESS team to start exploring other alternatives to the USAePay system.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting of the Finance Subcommittee will be a web conference scheduled for March 5, 2026.