

DRAFT



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



2017

Annual Performance Report

9
COUNTIES

33
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS

72
CITIES

147
TOWNSHIPS

Introduction

Region Nine Development Commission is designated by the Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) as south central Minnesota's Economic Development District (EDD). The organizational structure focuses on regionalism, which creates a unique perspective of the area's economy. Being designated as the area EDD, Region Nine is responsible for the development and oversight of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a significant component of remaining a federally designated EDD. Continued eligibility of the EDD designation is based upon Region Nine completing an update of the CEDS in conformance with 13 CFR Chapter III §303.7 every five years and submitting a supplemental annual performance report for subsequent years. In December of 2016, Region Nine submitted its 2016-2021 CEDS five-year update to the EDA, which can be found on Region Nine's website.

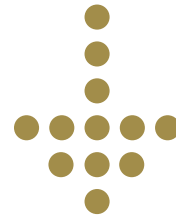
The CEDS and consecutive annual performance reports will ultimately enhance and support current and future economic development efforts in the region and engage local, regional, state and federal partners. Region Nine and its public, private and non-profit partners will champion and advance effective, sustainable and resilient rural economic development in south central Minnesota. This annual performance report analyzes Region Nine's current economic conditions and serves as an update on the region's progress and updated prioritization of the goals, strategies and action steps outlined in the 2016-2021 CEDS.

In 2012, the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations began working on a Greater Minnesota development strategy, DevelopMN. DevelopMN establishes the strategic framework for coordinated action to create a greater overall development impact in Greater Minnesota. During DevelopMN's creation, four cornerstones were identified as key components of strong regions and communities: human capital, economic competitiveness, community resources and foundational assets. To ensure alignment between state and regional plans, Region Nine designed its regional planning process, the 2016-2021 CEDS and the 2017 Annual Performance Report on these four cornerstones.

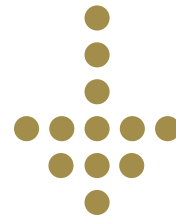
How is the CEDS used?



Supports local needs and priority projects
Helps identify the local champions



Offers opportunities for collaborative efforts in Greater Minnesota
Identifies additional state and regional resources



Leverages federal resources
Partner and collaborate with other federal agencies

Acknowledgments

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*Serve on the Region Nine Community and Economic Development Planning Committee

** Region Nine Commissioner

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About Region Nine Development Commission

Region Nine Development Commission serves nine counties in south central Minnesota: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca and Watonwan. Region Nine takes great pride in working with and on behalf of these counties and their cities, townships and school districts. Since 1972, being a partner for progress has led to the development of programs in the areas of economic development, business development, healthy communities, transportation, community development and leveraging regional resources. Region Nine is governed by 39 regional leaders. These leaders include elected officials representing nine counties, 72 cities, 147 townships, school districts, the Minnesota Valley Council of Governments and special interest groups including, Health and Human Welfare, Minority Populations and Youth.

Region Nine receives an annual planning grant from the Federal EDA to conduct economic development planning activities within the district. Activities range from developing and maintaining the CEDS, leading regional-based economic development goals and strategies, facilitating the regional Community and Economic Development Planning Committee, hosting regional grant opportunities forums, workforce forums and assisting communities who are interested in seeking Federal EDA funding.



The Process

October
2017

Coordinated and facilitated a goals, strategies and action step analysis review and discussion with Region Nine's Community and Economic Development Planning Committee. Planning Committee members also submitted local and regional projects and programs that support and further the goals, strategies and action steps within the 2016-2021 CEDS. The 35-member committee consists of a wide range of representation from across the nine counties.

Developed and distributed a prioritization survey to supplement information gathered from the Community and Economic Development Planning Committee analysis review and discussion. The survey re-prioritized the goals, strategies and action steps that were originally developed for the 2016-2012 CEDS to reassess if priorities have shifted. The survey was aggressively promoted through press releases, social media advertisements, website banners and Region Nine's network of partners. In total, the survey received a total of 73 responses from individuals across the region that either live and/or work in the nine county area.

November
2017

The draft document of the 2017 Annual Performance Report was made available online at www.rndc.org for a 30-day public comment and review period from November 8 - December 8, 2017. A paper copy was available upon request. Press releases and social media announcements were used to inform the region that the 2017 Annual Performance Report was ready for public review.

December
2017

The South Central Workforce Development Committee and the South Central Workforce Council reviewed and provided a resolution for the approval of Region Nine's 2017 Annual Performance Report on December 13, 2017. The resolution can be found in Appendix I.

The Region Nine Board of Director's reviewed and provided a resolution for the approval of the 2017 Annual Performance Report on December 13, 2017. The resolution can be found in the Appendix I.

The Vision

The CEDS will promote the

economic & socio-economic development

in the region through intergovernmental cooperation, long-range planning, strategic planning and technical assistance.

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Regional Overview



Population

While there is one major metropolitan area located in the region, the Mankato-North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), the region has a large rural base. Of the 231,683 people, around 56,616 reside in the Mankato-North Mankato area. There are five other cities in the region with estimated populations over 5,000: New Ulm (13,539), St. Peter (11,807), Fairmont (10,353), Waseca (9,124) and New Prague (7,585). In all, Region Nine represents 9.32 percent of the population outside of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul region.¹

According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Region Nine in the past 15 years grew at a slower rate of four percent comparatively to Minnesota, who experienced a 11 percent population increase. The region's growth is concentrated primarily in three of the nine counties: Blue Earth (+19.2% growth), Nicollet (+11.7% growth) and Le Sueur (+7.8% growth). The other six counties ranged between -3.8 percent and -14.7 percent population decrease, with the largest loss occurring in Faribault County.¹

231,683
people in Region Nine

Age

There are two prominent trends in south central Minnesota's age demographics. First, the population projections from the Minnesota State Demographic Center indicate over the next 30 years, ages 65+ and 85+ will greatly increase in population. Currently, Minnesota is on the cusp of witnessing new historical highs for both of these age groups. The increase in the older adult population can be attributed to the large Baby Boomer population and the increased life expectancies. These age groups will grow at an exponential rate and will eventually outnumber the other age groups.

In contrast, as a percentage, both Blue Earth and Nicollet counties top the statewide list as having the highest representation of 18-34 year olds in the state of Minnesota. Blue Earth County alone has 22.9 percent of the population being comprised of 18-24 year olds versus 9.5 percent statewide. In particular, the City of Mankato's young adult population represents just under half of its total population (48%). The large draw for this age group is the area's abundance of educational opportunities.²

Race

Based on 2011-2015 American Community Survey Estimates, south central Minnesota counties are predominantly white ranging from 92.1-97.7 percent of the total population in these counties. The most racially diverse county in the region is Blue Earth county with the population consisting of 92.1 percent white, 3.1 percent black or African American, two percent Asian, and two percent of two or more races. Faribault County is one of the least diverse counties in the region, with a 97.7 percent white population.

Unique to the south central region, Watonwan County has a growing Hispanic or Latino population, with 22.1 percent of the total population being Hispanic or Latino and 16.8 percent of households speaking a language other than English at home. This large Hispanic and Latino population is a growing influence in the local workforce and economy.³

Education

Education is vital when aligning worker skills with the needs of employers, which is critical to increasing productivity and growing the region's economy. Nicollet County has the highest percentage of people that have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher at 32.5 percent.⁴ Blue Earth County has the second highest with 31.3 percent, in comparison to the State of Minnesota which has 33.7 percent. Both the City of Mankato and the City of North Mankato have the highest percent of population that has completed a bachelor's degree or higher with 35.3 percent and 36.8 percent respectively.

Collectively, all of Region Nine's counties have a slightly lower percentage of high school graduates than the state. Blue Earth County has the highest percentage of graduates at 94.3 percent and Watonwan County has the lowest at 85.3 percent. Additionally, seven out of the nine counties in the region have a larger percentage of individuals who have an associate's degree comparatively to the state's 10.7 percent.

The region has several higher educational institutions that offer a wide variety of disciplines and programs including:

- Minnesota State University, Mankato: a four year, public university which, offers 130 programs of study
- South Central College: a community technical college that offers 50 technical career and professional programs
- Bethany Lutheran College: a private liberal arts college that offers 24 majors, 24 minors and eight pre-professional programs
- Rasmussen College: a private college offering approximately 40 programs ranging from the certificate and diploma level through the associate's, bachelor's and master's level
- Gustavus Adolphus College: a private liberal arts college that offers 72 majors and 12 interdisciplinary programs
- Martin Luther College. a private college that offers over a dozen majors as well as graduate degrees in education

³ Minnesota State Demographic Center Population Estimates, 2015 <http://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/age-race-ethnicity/>

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Economy

Most of Region Nine does not meet the traditional economic distress criteria. This poses a unique challenge to the region when aligning traditional economic development funding for projects contingent on traditional economic distress criteria. Ultimately, the challenges posed by an economy doing well are impending workforce shortages, where to hire new workers from, and how to access funding streams for projects in which workforce benchmarks are critical. New benchmarks for analysis, such as increase and decrease of civilian labor force are new opportunities to assess the economic climate of the region.

Region Nine, as a whole, had an unemployment rate in the past 24 months that was below the national average. Its 2015 Per-Capita Money Income was at 94.53 percent of the national average, and its 2015 Per-Capita Personal Income⁵ was at \$44,448 – 92.38 percent of the national average. None of these indicators are low enough to meet conventional economic distress criteria.

Region Nine would need to see an increase in unemployment by greater than 2.01 percent (which, as of 2015, would be close to 2,000 additional unemployed workers) and a nearly 12.38 percent drop in Per-Capita Personal Income in order to be considered distressed. Blue Earth, Faribault, and Watonwan counties are the closest, but do not presently meet the criteria.

Region Nine Economic Distress⁶

County	24 Month Unemp	Above/ Below Nation	Per Capita Personal Income	Above/ Below Nation	Per-Capita Money Income	Above/ Below Nation
Blue Earth	3.14	-1.64	\$43,168	89.7	\$26,440	91.4
Brown	4.09	-0.69	\$47,688	99.1	\$28,018	96.8
Faribault	4.47	-0.31	\$42,967	89.3	\$27,135	93.8
Le Sueur	4.91	0.13	\$44,197	91.9	\$28,483	98.5
Martin	4.02	-0.76	\$47,232	98.2	\$28,244	97.6
Nicollet	2.78	-2.00	\$44,646	92.8	\$28,118	97.2
Sibley	4.15	-0.63	\$43,865	91.2	\$27,493	95
Waseca	4.24	-0.54	\$46,847	97.4	\$26,457	91.5
Watonwan	4.86	0.08	\$38,124	79.2	\$25,973	89.8



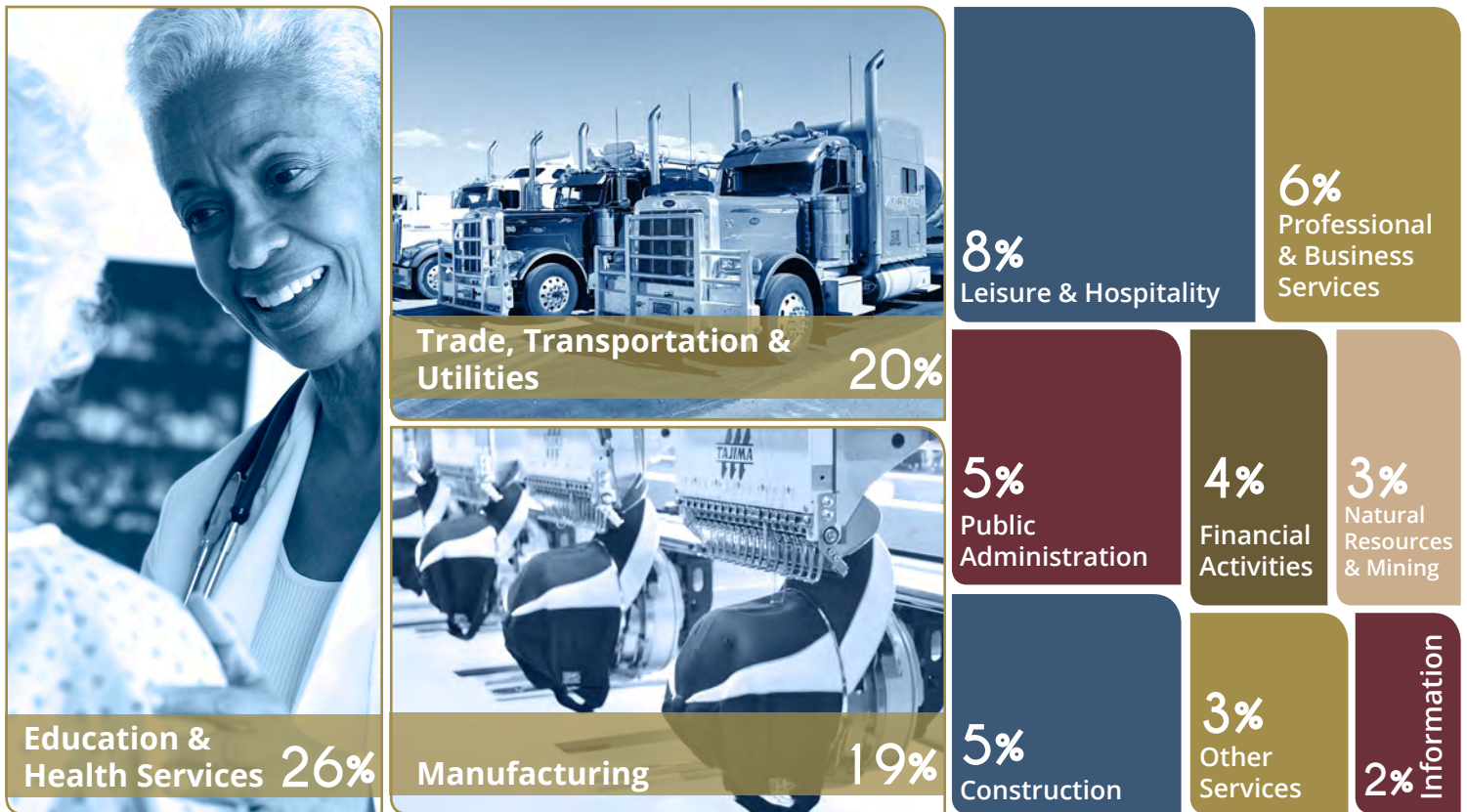
⁵Calculations generated by StatsAmerica's *Measuring Distress*

⁶U.S. Bureaus of Census, Labor Statistics, and Economic Analysis; Calculations generated by StatsAmerica, September 2017

Workforce

The major employment industries in Region Nine continue to be education and health services; trade, transportation, and utilities; and manufacturing.⁷ Combined, these three industries accounted for nearly two-thirds of all jobs in the region in 2016.

Industry Employment Breakdown⁷



The Great Recession of 2008 – 2009 was one of the deepest in recent memory. Region Nine, however, entered the recession earlier than the state, with job losses from 2006 to 2008, before dropping most dramatically in 2010. Since then, the region has recovered at a rate much slower than the rest of the state.

Every major industry has recovered since 2010, but the true measure of the recovery is how many industries are recovered to pre-recessionary levels (pre-2008). As a whole, Region Nine has lost 0.9 percent of its covered jobs since 2007 and has gained employment in that time in only four major employment sectors:

- natural resources and mining: up by 23.09 percent with 635 jobs gained, which actually decreased from 23.6 percent or 650 jobs that were gained in 2015
- trade, transportation, and utilities: up 5.6 percent with 1,103 jobs gained
- education and health services: up 7.6 percent with 1,938 jobs gained
- public administration: up 9.1 percent with 468 jobs gained

Manufacturing is the third leading employing sector in the region and has been one of the slowest to recover. It has lost 2,361 jobs since 2007 despite gaining 1,343 jobs since 2010.

⁷ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

In order to actively recruit businesses and public sector employers, it is important to highlight a labor force that is willing, able and ready to work. The labor force in south central Minnesota is the total number of people aged 16 years and older that are either employed or unemployed. In order to be considered unemployed a person must be available and actively seeking work.

Much like the unemployment rate, labor force participation ebbs and flows. On a national and state level, it has decreased steadily since the turn of the millennium, and has dropped rather dramatically since the *Great Recession* of 2007 – 2009. Due to low unemployment and the recovery in full swing, these drops cannot simply be attributed to the recession. Many economists theorize that it is a result of the aging workforce, early retirements, and delayed entry into the workforce by younger workers as they seek additional education to expand their skillset to become more competitive for fewer jobs. This may be particularly impactful to rural communities in Region Nine that skew slightly older.

The American Community Survey data slightly reflects this, with workers aged 20 to 24 years and 55 to 64 years representing the lowest percentages of working age adults. Additionally, counties that skew much younger (Blue Earth 80.5%, Nicollet 76.8%, and Waseca 79.9%) also have the three lowest labor force participation rates among workers aged 20 to 24 years.

Conversely, Faribault and Martin County are ranked 75th and 69th among all 87 counties in Minnesota; they also have the highest labor force participation rates among 20 to 24-year-old workers. Watonwan County is unique because it skews young yet has a higher labor force participation rate than the state overall. Additionally, Watonwan County has labor force participation rates that are much higher than the region as a whole in the following demographics: Black or African American (67.6%), Asian (81.3%), Two or More Races (65%), Hispanic or Latino (80.9%),

Labor Force and Labor Force Participation ⁸	In Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate
Total Labor Force	129,561	69.7%
AGE		
16 to 19 years	8,189	58.2%
20 to 24 years	16,856	81.7%
25 to 44 years	48,580	89.5%
45 to 54 years	26,414	88.3%
55 to 64 years	23,304	77.4%
65 to 74 years	5,332	28.5%
75 years and over	1,154	6.3%
RACE AND HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN		
White Alone	123,797	69.8%
Black or African American	1,814	63.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native	332	59.5%
Asian	1,424	67.7%
Some other race	1,026	75.9%
Two or more races	1,146	67.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	5,389	71.1%
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
Population 25 to 64 years	97,986	86.0%
Less than high school graduate	4,571	69.5%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	29,263	82.9%
Some college or associate's degree	37,352	87.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	26,811	91.1%

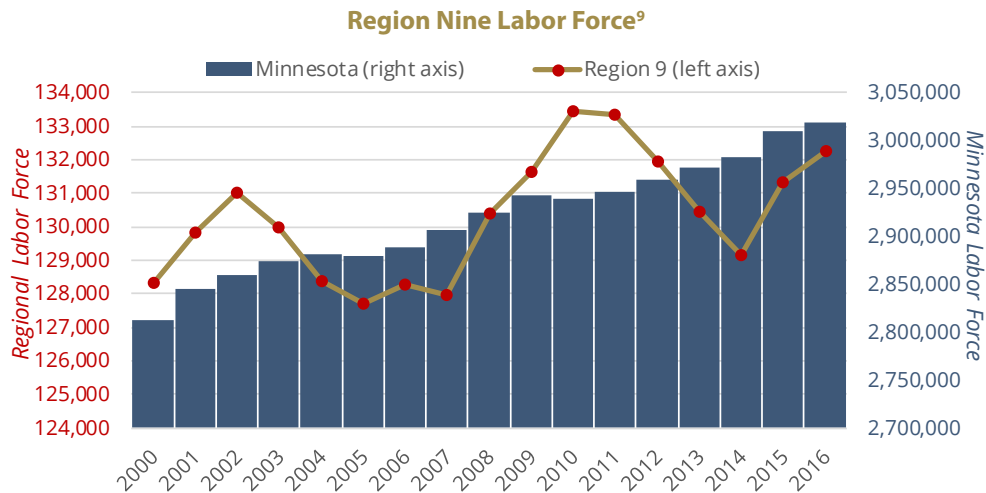
Age of Population⁸

County	Median Age	Statewide Rank
Blue Earth	30.1	1
Nicollet	35.7	13
Waseca	39	27
Watonwan	39.6	30
Le Sueur	41.3	41
Sibley	41.4	42
Brown	43.5	57
Martin	45.4	69
Faribault	46.7	75

⁸ S2301, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

and those with less than a high-school degree (77.2%). This is important to note because it is driven, by a large degree, by an unemployment rate that has significantly exceeded the region as a whole in every successive year since 2003. By this measure, Watonwan County was hit particularly hard during the height of the recession with an 8.8 percent unemployment rate (Region Nine’s was 7.5%) in 2009. Despite this fact, Watonwan County has recently experienced decreases in its labor force participation rates due to lower unemployment. In 2015, it had the lowest estimated unemployment rate in the region with 2.9 percent. Sibley (5.5%) and Le Sueur (5.3%) Counties had the highest unemployment rates but were still less than the statewide rate of 5.6 percent.

The unemployment rate for Region Nine in the past has generally mirrored the state but, more recently, all nine counties have had lower unemployment rates than the state.



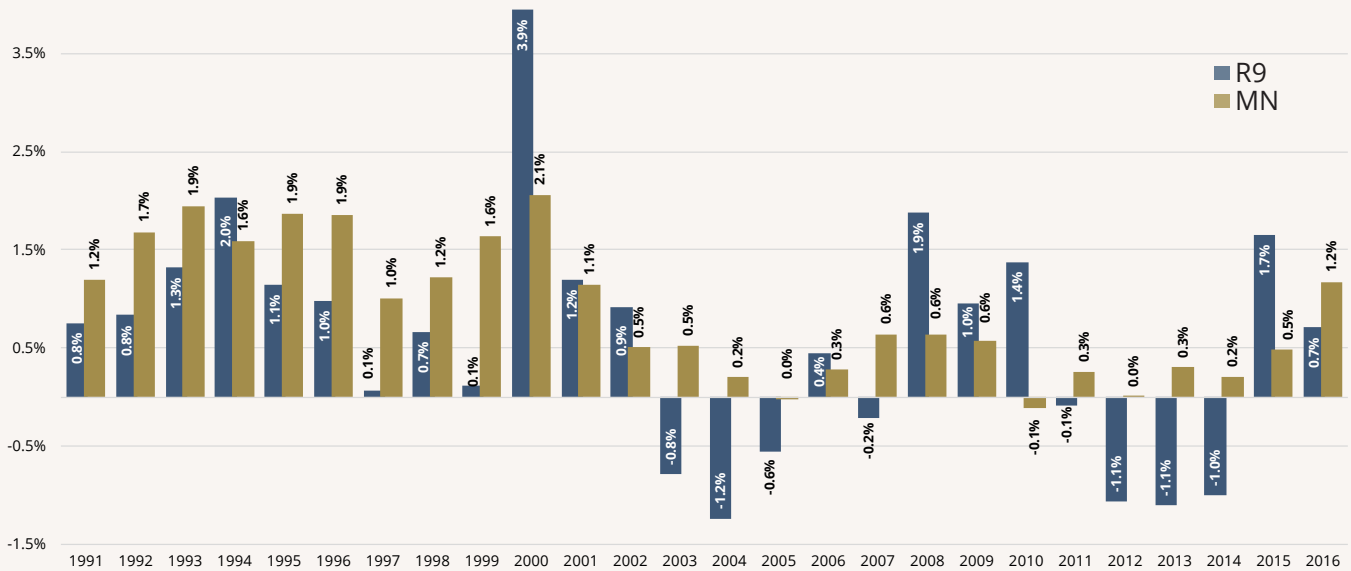
These rates have improved significantly since the economic recession of 2008. In 2009, Le Sueur County peaked at 10.9 percent, while the region as a whole peaked that year at 7.5 percent. Other counties in the region peaked in 2009 as well: Faribault (9.2%), Watonwan (8.8%), Waseca (8.2%), Sibley (7.9%), Martin (7.5%), Brown (7.3%), Blue Earth (6.4%), and Nicollet (6.3%).

According to DEED’s Labor Market Information Office, Nicollet and Blue Earth County (which encompass the Mankato-North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area) are historically among the lowest unemployment rates in the state. Consequently, the region as a whole, has been inching towards “full employment”, the point at which many economists agree that virtually all people who are able and willing to work are employed.

In theory, when there is full employment there is less room for upward growth. If everyone that is willing and able to work has a job, hiring becomes a challenge. Accordingly, the most recent recession masked the trend of older workers dropping out of the labor force. This, combined with a labor force that is growing, but at much slower rate statewide, and had actually declined from 2011 to 2014, before gaining in 2015 and 2016 respectively in Region Nine, is projected to lead to a shortage of workers. Meanwhile, the Mankato-North Mankato area is among the youngest in the state, has a diverse mix of jobs, and an unemployment rate that fell below three percent in 2014 and has consistently remained between three - 3.5 percent into 2017. With diversity on the rise, opportunities exist for inclusionary strategies to engage diverse cultures and females to respond to the potential workforce shortage.

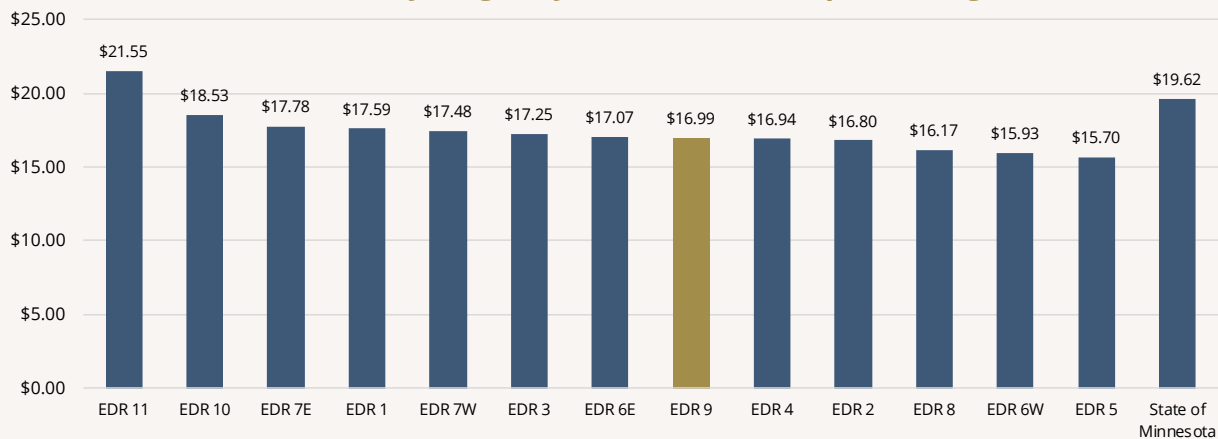
Annual Change in Labor Force 1991-2016¹⁰

Average Region Nine Increase: 15%



As of the first quarter of 2017, Region Nine remains the eighth highest median hourly wage across all occupations, and had the fifth highest estimated employment. This was approximately \$2.63 below the state median, with the gap widening from 2015's \$2.49 below state median. This remains heavily driven by the 1.7-million estimated jobs in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area.

Median Hourly Wages by Economic Development Region¹⁰



Among the highest paying occupations in Region Nine were management (median hourly wage of \$49.20 across 5,610 jobs), legal (\$40.36 across 280 jobs), computer and mathematical (median hourly wage of \$39.75 across 2,210 jobs) and architecture and engineering (\$35.96 across 1,770 jobs). Some of the highest employing occupational sectors included office and administrative support (16,200 estimated jobs); production (12,120); sales and related occupations (11,390); and transportation and material moving (8,740).

¹⁰ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Local Area Unemployment Statistics
¹¹ DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, 1st Q, 2017

Among the highest concentrated; farming, fishing and forestry occupations are significantly meeting local needs with a location quotient of 2.1 despite the lowest number of estimated jobs (320). Some of the most prevalent occupations in the region have significant industry concentration that is meeting local demand to the point of being distinguishing industries, these include education, training and library occupations and production occupations. Consequently, office and administrative support occupations and sales occupations have a location quotient of 1.0, which means that the region and the nation are equally specialized. Essentially, the occupations with the greatest number of employment are highly concentrated, or meeting local demand. Food preparation workers, business and financial operations, and management occupations have room to grow despite having high employment across the nine counties.

Occupational Employment Statistics
1st Quarter 2017¹¹

	Region Nine			State of MN
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage
Total, All Occupations	\$16.99	114,470	1	\$19.62
Management	\$38.50	5,610	0.8	\$49.20
Legal	\$38.02	280	0.4	\$40.36
Architecture & Engineering	\$31.25	1,770	0.8	\$35.96
Business & Financial Operations	\$28.11	4,040	0.6	\$31.83
Computer & Mathematical	\$28.06	2,210	0.6	\$39.75
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$26.64	8,200	1.2	\$32.85
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$25.32	870	0.9	\$30.59
Construction & Extraction	\$23.78	3,190	0.8	\$26.55
Education, Training & Library	\$21.93	8,540	1.3	\$23.33
Community & Social Service	\$21.93	1,670	0.8	\$21.32
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$21.09	3,960	1.0	\$22.41
Protective Service	\$19.92	2,220	1.3	\$19.80
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$17.91	1,310	0.9	\$22.39
Production	\$17.29	12,120	1.3	\$17.46
Transportation & Material Moving	\$16.49	8,740	1.2	\$17.06
Office & Administrative Support	\$16.40	16,200	1.0	\$18.26
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$14.15	320	2.1	\$15.31
Healthcare Support	\$13.04	3,830	1.1	\$15.11
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$12.22	3,490	1.0	\$13.68
Personal Care & Service	\$12.21	7,080	1.3	\$11.77
Sales & Related	\$11.41	11,390	1.0	\$13.48
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$9.97	6,900	0.7	\$10.05

The Department of Employment and Economic Development produces projections by occupation and industry. Region Nine is included in the southwest planning region, which includes southwest Minnesota (Southwest Regional Development Commission) and counties to the north (Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission). According to these projections, southwest Minnesota's industry growth is projected to see the greatest gains by 2024 in both the the health care and social assistance industry (projected to add 3,111 new jobs at a 12.0% increase), which aligns directly with many of the highest growing occupation projections. Public Administration, on the other hand, is expected to contract by -3.6 percent (realizing losses of 1,134 jobs). Real Estate, rental and leasing industry is expected to grow by 12.3 percent (adding 151 jobs), while the information sector (-5.8% decrease, 166 job loss) is expected to continue to lose employment despite significant need.

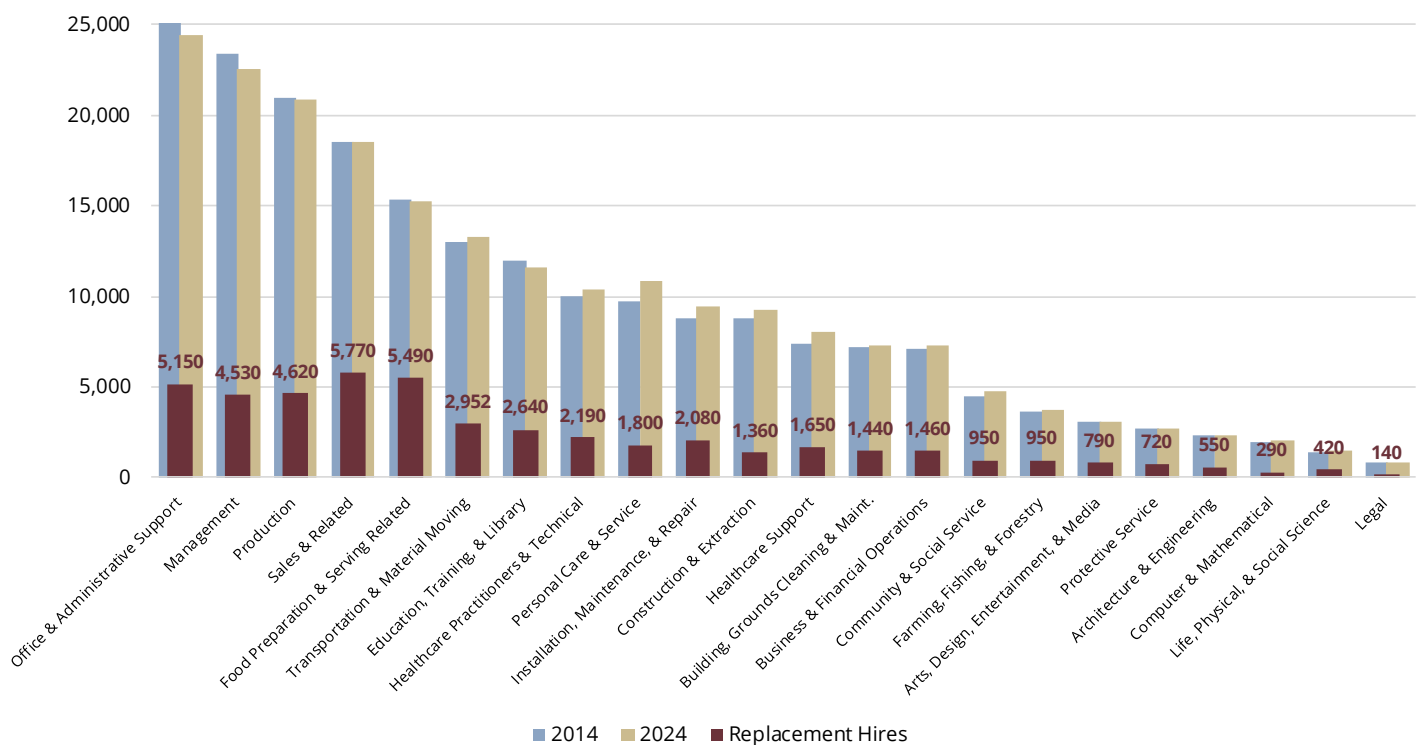
Southwest Minnesota Occupational Projections, 2014 - 2024¹²

Industry	Estimated Employment 2012	Projected Employment 2022	Percent Change 2012 - 2022
Total, All Industries	208,555	210,669	1.0%
Manufacturing	31,340	30,844	-1.5%
Public Administration	31,816	30,682	-3.6%
Health Care and Social Assistance	25,914	29,025	12.0%
Retail Trade	20,285	19,570	-3.5%
Accommodation and Food Services	12,038	12,106	0.5%
Wholesale Trade	8,104	8,457	4.3%
Construction	7,613	8,164	7.2%
Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	8,056	7,901	-1.9%
Finance and Insurance	6,131	6,399	4.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	5,377	5,583	3.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	5,335	5,360	0.4%
Administrative and Waste Services	4,200	4,566	8.7%
Professional and Technical Services	4,301	4,458	3.6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	2,556	2,784	8.9%
Information	2,839	2,673	-5.8%
Educational Services	1,950	1,920	-1.5%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,822	1,625	-10.8%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1,225	1,376	12.3%
Utilities	813	760	-6.5%
Mining	391	408	4.3%

Southwest Minnesota is projected to grow by one percent by 2024, resulting in 2,114 new jobs and 48,070 replacement hires needed to fill jobs vacated by the current workforce. Projections for the Mankato-North Mankato MSA are included in southwest Minnesota.

Much of this growth will be the southeast response to Destination Medical Center, which will flow into the south central region. Wages will vary, with healthcare growth primarily in the practitioner occupations with median wages in excess of \$80.00 per hour and healthcare support occupations earning significantly less. In Region Nine specifically, healthcare practitioners and technical occupations continue to have room to add more jobs to meet the demands of the region.

Southern Minnesota Projections by Occupational Grouping¹³



Highest Growing Occupations:

Personal Care & Service Occupations

Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations

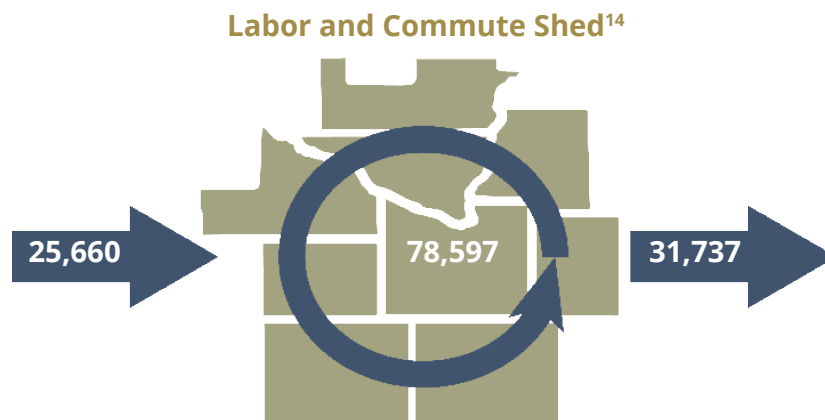
Healthcare Support Occupations

Construction and Extraction Occupations

¹²Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2014-2024 Employment Outlook
¹³ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2017

Approximately 76.6 percent of workers within the labor shed of Region Nine either live and work in the region or live outside the region and work within the region. The top work destination in the region is Mankato-North Mankato, which accounted for 17.9 percent of employment. 4.8 percent of workers in the region lived in New Ulm, while 3.8 percent lived in Fairmont, and 3.6 percent lived in Waseca. The top commuters into the region from outside the region were from Minneapolis (0.8%), Owatonna (0.6%), and St. Paul (0.5%). Of the 31,737 residents of Region Nine that work outside the nine counties, many of those commuters are employed in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, Owatonna, or Rochester.

Although the numbers are not significant, 1.3 percent of all workers in the region (representing over 1,300 workers) commuted into Bloomington, 1.2 percent (approximately 1,200 workers) into Owatonna, 1.1 percent into Minneapolis, 1 percent into St. Paul, 0.7 percent into Faribault, 0.7 percent into Shakopee and 0.6 percent into Rochester.



Economic Resiliency

Economic resiliency in a regional context requires intergovernmental agility when anticipating risks, evaluating impacts on economic assets and increasing responsive capacity. The EDA recognizes that regional economic prosperity is linked to an area’s ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock and the ability to avoid the shock all together.

When considering economic resilience, it is important for local economic practitioners and organizations to consider their role in both preparation for potential economic disruptions and recovery from those disruptions. Local economic practitioners and organizations can assist with post-incident coordination, information dissemination, responding to external inquiries and the lead grant administrator for federally-funded recovery initiatives.

The regional CEDS document and subsequent annual performance reports are critical mechanisms that identify regional vulnerabilities and mitigates or helps respond to economic disruptions. Woven throughout the 2016 - 2021 CEDS and the 2017 Annual Performance Report is components of economic resilience. Much of the region’s unique vulnerabilities are articulated in both the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis and throughout several goals and strategies in the plan. The goals and strategies construct a foundation for increased regional resiliency and support any economic mitigation efforts for future natural or economic disasters. In addition, throughout the CEDS and annual performance report planning processes, Region Nine established and continues to strengthen a network of cross-sector stakeholders that collaborate and communicate about existing and potential future challenges.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau Local Employment Household Dynamics, OnTheMap, 2014

The Cornerstones

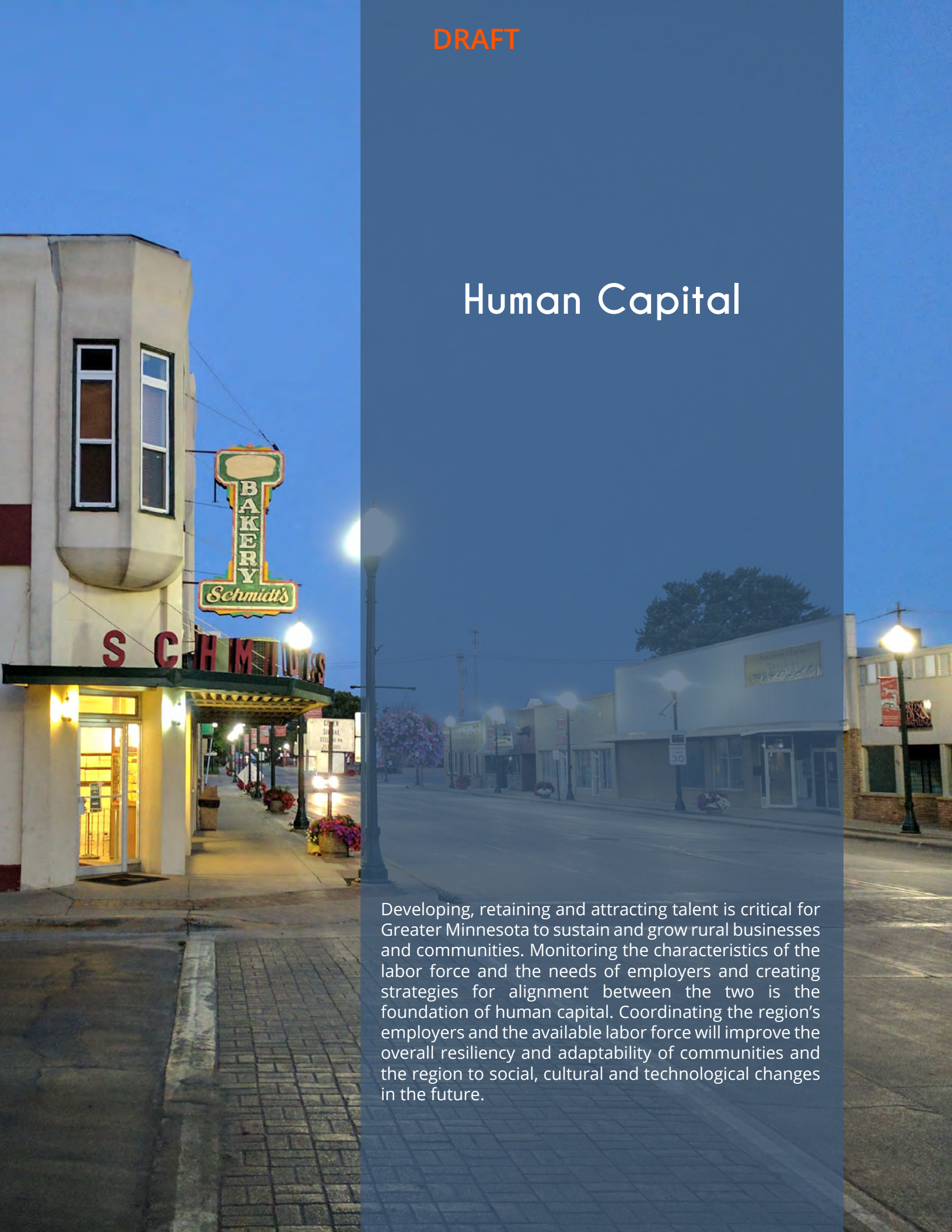


The following section is divided into four cornerstones:

1. Human Capital
2. Economic Competitiveness
3. Community Resources
4. Foundational Assets

Each cornerstone has associated goals, strategies and action steps. The strategies (*) and action steps (o) have been prioritized and categorized by a corresponding colored bullet (blue-high, gold-medium, maroon-low). An action table located in Appendix III identifies key partners, timelines and evaluation metrics for each strategy and action step outlined in the CEDS.

Human Capital



Developing, retaining and attracting talent is critical for Greater Minnesota to sustain and grow rural businesses and communities. Monitoring the characteristics of the labor force and the needs of employers and creating strategies for alignment between the two is the foundation of human capital. Coordinating the region's employers and the available labor force will improve the overall resiliency and adaptability of communities and the region to social, cultural and technological changes in the future.

Labor Force

As Region Nine's economy continues to recover from the economic recession, the challenge will be meeting the hiring and skills needs of area employers. The labor force of Region Nine declined four years in a row (2011-2014), then increased to above pre-recession levels in 2015 and continued to increase in 2016. Additionally, this decline (2011-2014) was supplemented by a decrease in unemployment as the economy improves to pre-recessionary levels.



Goal

Maintain the existing unemployment rate, move towards full employment in each county and focus on worker recruitment strategies to mitigate impending labor market shortages.

Strategies

- ★ Promote a quality, flexible and trained workforce to area businesses.
 - Increase opportunities for encore careers and returning graduates to return to the regional workforce.
 - Partner with educational institutions, workforce councils, local economic developers, business development centers, workforce centers and employers to promote incumbent worker upskilling to increase mentorships and potentially elevate wages and knowledge across the region.
 - Connect and support communities with high concentration of minority populations to inclusion opportunities (e.g. Gaylord, Madelia, Mankato/North Mankato MSA., and St. James). These communities will have the opportunity to access these specific talent pools and market the community as a place of high inclusion.
- ★ Enhance and capitalize on the quality of life amenities to retain the talent in the region.
 - Build and improve childcare capacity and availability throughout the region.
 - Retain the 75.4 percent of workers that presently live and work in Region Nine and commute to Region Nine for work; capture the nearly 32,000 jobs that the region is exporting to other areas of the state.¹⁵
 - Increase the median wage across all occupations in south central Minnesota from \$16.99 per hour closer to the state median wage of \$19.62 per hour by focusing on high wage and high employment occupations.¹⁶
 - Connect, promote and incentivize businesses to create great places to work.
 - Partner with area employers and workforce partners to create, evaluate and publish a list of top workplaces in the region.

¹⁵ American Community Survey 2014 Data, OnTheMap

¹⁶ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Occupational Employment Statistics, 2016

Educational Attainment

As the population of south central Minnesota's workforce declines, increased worker skills will be critical to improving productivity and growth of the economy. According to the 2011-2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, Nicollet County has the highest percentage of people that have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher at 32.5 percent¹⁷. Blue Earth County has the second highest with 31.3 percent, which, in comparison, the state of Minnesota has 33.7 percent of population that has obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.

Goal



Increase the number of residents (ages 18-64) who have completed post-secondary education or training with a particular focus on certificates, technical degrees and apprenticeships relevant to employment in middle-skill, living wage occupations.

Strategies

- ★ Increase the awareness among students, parents and educators about the educational requirements for future employment opportunities specific to the region.
 - Offer and promote incentives, upskilling, job training and fast track education opportunities.
 - Greater collaboration and coordination of programs amongst higher education institutions and major regional employers.
 - Pursue additional funding to secure additional school and career counselors.
- ★ Offer and increase the availability of cultural competency education throughout the region.

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Economic Competitiveness

Creating an attractive environment for growth is critical to creating jobs, improving living standards and financing necessary public services. Economic Competitiveness requires communities to develop and link all available assets to support innovation and encourage business growth. With the identification and alignment of our regional and local assets, south central Minnesota will be able to support small, medium and large scale enterprises, which could in turn stimulate business growth, innovation and an increase in the overall productivity of the region.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

South central Minnesota communities must embrace and encourage innovation, calculated risk-taking and foster entrepreneurship to compete effectively in the global economy. As of 2014, the State of Minnesota ranks 16th in the nation for research and development funding. Both public and private sectors provide \$1 billion annually into research and development of science and technology projects.¹⁸



Goal

Increase entrepreneurship and innovation throughout south central Minnesota's communities.

Strategies

- ★ Increase and diversify access to capital to boost entrepreneurship and innovation.
 - Encourage partnership between local public and private sectors for incentives and programs for area businesses, such as tax increment financing, tax abatement, or DEED's Business Development Public Infrastructure program to attract entrepreneurs to the region and align the recruited entrepreneurs with the local employment needs.
 - Incentivize local employers with the research and development tax credit to encourage and increase research and development in the region.
- ★ Progress research and development projects into marketable technology production that will ultimately increase STEM industries that will spur economic development throughout the region.
 - Directly connect higher education institutions, including Minnesota State University, Mankato, South Central College, Bethany Lutheran College, Rasmussen College, Gustavus Adolphus College and Martin Luther College, directly to major employers for potential research and development collaborations.
 - Create networks of incubator, co-working, proof of concept, maker spaces, innovation centers and tech centers in the region and connect to regional partners for education, training and STEM programming to spur innovation throughout the region.
- ★ Explore incentives and expand renewable energy development.

Small Business Growth

Small businesses located in rural areas have limited access to capital compared to larger businesses. In order to grow and expand, small rural businesses must have access to more public and private funding opportunities. Approximately 71.1 percent of businesses in Region Nine have less than ten employees (compared to 71.4% statewide).¹⁹ Research shows that as much as 80 percent of job growth in a community comes from existing businesses.²⁰



Goal

Increase the number of capital investment programs available to small and medium enterprises (SME), small is considered 20 or fewer employees, medium is considered 21-50 employees, to allow growth and job creation for the majority of Region Nine businesses.

Strategies

- ★ Partner with the Small Business Development Center, South Central MN S.C.O.R.E., Regional Center for Entrepreneurial Facilitation and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation to help them expand and funnel their resources into the most rural areas in south central Minnesota.
 - Partner and support legislation, utilizing statewide support, to expand the Small Business Development Center, South Central MN S.C.O.R.E., Regional Center for Entrepreneurial Facilitation and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation's capacity to build out their network and increase resources for rural SMEs.
- ★ Develop and promote a regional marketing strategy with a clear and concise message to attract potential new residents by leveraging regional resources, such as the University of Minnesota Extension, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, Green Seam, Region Nine and other regional partners.
- ★ Continue to grow and support businesses with global connections through e-commerce.
- ★ Support local grocers in rural communities to improve access to healthy and sustainable foods.

¹⁹ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Business Employment Dynamics, 2016

²⁰ University of Minnesota Extension/Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

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Community Resources

Communities seek to maintain rural values, their heritage and the assets that support them. Community resources include topics that balance the preservation and improvements of local social, cultural and natural assets that are critical for the future. Building, improving and promoting regional and community strengths will lead to a competitive advantage and provide a foundation of community resiliency. By working together regionally, resources and opportunities can be maximized and regional economic success can be achieved.

Tourism

Tourism can be an essential industry for local economic development. Travel and tourism generates sales in every county in the Region Nine service area. Traveler spending indirectly supports jobs in supporting industries such as financial services or printing. Travel and tourism in Region Nine generated approximately \$377 million in gross sales in 2015.²¹



Goal

Increase visitor spending in south central Minnesota.

Strategies

- ★ Capitalize on current tourism destinations and future development of new destinations.
 - Promote agricultural-based tourism and pursue potential for tourism development surrounding the agriculture sector and local foods.
 - Promote nature-based tourism and pursue potential for development of new hospitality and nature access ventures.
 - Capitalize on commuters traveling to Rochester’s Destination Medical Center and the Minneapolis-St. Paul by expanding access to businesses and promoting tourist destinations along major transportation routes, e.g. U.S. Highway 169 and Interstate 90.
- ★ Create and promote “unique niches” through placemaking, comprehensive planning or capital improvement planning to map out a community brand and vision in scalable increments for the next three, five and ten years.
 - Promote and highlight local businesses and their locally produced products.
 - Work with local chambers of commerce and businesses to create downtown festivals and fairs in communities where downtowns benefit from an influx of pedestrians and customers.
 - Increase the capacity of commuter bus lines, land-to-air buses, taxi services and ridesharing to expand south central’s tourism from the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. The connections could link to state parks, historical destinations and downtowns, e.g. Mankato, Henderson, New Ulm as well as lakes and regional parks and trails.
 - Organize both amateur and professional athletics to draw people to park systems or town centers.

Social Capital

Local residents must encourage and foster new local leadership skills as well as promote and attend civic engagement opportunities in order to become resilient against future challenges. Results from Region Nine's CEDS survey indicates approximately 74.54 percent of survey participants that either live and/or work in the Region Nine area currently believe that the development of community leaders in the region is average, below average or needs improvement.



Goal

Increase civic engagement and community participation across all age groups and ethnicities.

Strategies

- ★ Build upon the strong foundation of community participation and support found in local communities.
 - Utilize innovative civic engagement techniques to draw perspectives from youth and people from long distances to increase engagement and input.
 - Increase voter turnout in all nine counties from 69.6 percent to 74.7 percent, as reported from the 2016 general election, to compare with average voter turnout statewide.²²
- ★ Increase mentorship opportunities for younger generations to assume future community leadership positions.
 - Support local community leadership programs and networking groups.

Arts and Culture

Arts and local culture contribute to the vibrancy of local economies and the quality of life experienced by local residents. The arts and entertainment sector experienced a drop in employment following the most recent recession. In each of the past three years, this sector has increased in employment and has stabilized in 2016 partly due to an increase in consumer confidence. Employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector represents one percent of the total employment in Region Nine in 2016.²³



Goal

Increase employment in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector to generate customers in downtown districts and increase community engagement.

Strategies

- ◆ Increase coordinated regional promotion of all cultural and arts related events for greater reach and community support of these sectors.
 - Partner with area universities, technical colleges and school districts to promote art programs, art walks and art-related events and courses in rural communities.
 - Create a traveling art showcase that promotes art education and area artists, including theater arts, photography and digital art.
- ◆ Implement arts and culture-based placemaking to improve downtowns and public spaces.
 - Reuse vacant storefronts, warehouses, etc. to host new and emerging artists, galleries and experimental spaces.
 - Apply and receive designation as an Artspace Community.
 - Establish a grant or a revolving loan fund opportunity for arts-centered commerce.

Natural Resources

The region offers an abundance of natural resources that are essential to the local, regional and statewide economies. As the population of the state continues to increase, strain on natural resources is on the rise. Multiple threats include groundwater overuse and contamination, invasive species and an overall decline of natural resources. One of the region's largest natural resource is the productive soil. Region Nine's natural resources and mining sector provides 3,384 jobs, 75.7 percent of those are animal production and aquaculture. Of the 3,384, 44.7 percent are hog and pig farms, 13.1 percent are cattle ranching and 12 percent are dairy cattle and milk production.²⁴



Goal

Protect and preserve natural resources for continued responsible use. Achieve no net loss of wetlands/prairie lands and add programs and policies that reduce the carbon footprint through renewable energy or energy efficiency initiatives.

Strategies

- ★ Conserve valuable natural resources and protect outdoor heritage through education, preservation and conservation efforts.
- ★ Actively engage the public in natural resource planning to achieve greater community awareness and support of reducing overall carbon footprints.
 - Develop, implement and consistently enforce land use policies that balance economic competitiveness and resilience with human well-being and natural amenities preservation.
 - Promote compact and infill development of cities and urban areas that include mixed commercial and mixed residential zoning to reduce the number of vehicles traveled and reduce costs associated with heating and cooling, saving communities and businesses on land-use expenses.
 - Retrofit and convert energy inefficient building's waste into Combined Heat and Power buildings to deliver hot water, heat and electric generation uses.

Water Quality

There is an increased demand for water resources related to growing populations, agricultural and manufacturing utilization and an increase in urbanization and recreational activities. For 2018 the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) identified 97 additions in their draft impaired waters list that are in Region Nine of about 5,102 listings statewide. MPCA delisted one impaired body of water in 2018.²⁵



Goal

Improve water quality by ensuring south central Minnesota's groundwater and surface water supplies are protected from depletion and degradation by reducing the number of impaired waters and endangered ecosystems in the region.

Strategies

- ★ Promote adherence to the Federal Clean Water Act standards that presume a water body should sustain healthy aquatic life, recreation and additional uses, such as drinking water, industry and agricultural uses.
- ★ Promote intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships related to water quality plans, projects and initiatives.
 - Support and promote regional water quality plans, projects and initiatives.
- ★ Enhance soil and water management by increasing conservation practices, retaining top soil and agriculture productivity during extreme rain, drought and freezing events.

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Foundational Assets

Communities require proactive and collaborative strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing access, maintenance, replacement and growth of community infrastructure is key to preserving and providing growth opportunities locally. Foundational assets include both above-ground and below-ground infrastructure such as transportation, utilities and water. The maintenance and expansion of the region's foundational assets will increase south central Minnesota's competitiveness for future internal and external business investments. Ultimately, efficient infrastructure will support economic strength and vitality as well as increasing communities' standard of living.

Broadband Access

Access to affordable high-speed internet is imperative to remain competitive in today's global economy. In order to attract employers and to increase the area's employment, there needs to be a foundation of broadband infrastructure. Broadband infrastructure can be a catalyst in local economies and ultimately lead to regional economic growth. In Region Nine, 75.1 percent of all households are served at the state broadband goal of greater than 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload speeds in 2017.



Goal

Businesses, households and community anchor institutions in Region Nine will all have access to high-speed internet at statewide broadband goals, with infrastructure in place to upscale.

Strategies

- ★ Create and leverage public and private partnerships, establish co-operatives and work with all wireline providers in the region to improve access to high-speed internet.
 - Leverage federal program dollars, CAF II, and ARRA to meet national speed goals of 10/1 as Phase I to implement high-speed internet access across the nine counties, and provide scalable infrastructure that can provide speeds in excess of 1:1 gig symmetrical speeds.
- ★ Promote the benefits of high-speed internet in rural Minnesota, show return on investment and gather public input and/or conduct a community broadband feasibility study.
 - Work with all communities within the region to meet the Minnesota Governor's Broadband Task Force 2016 annual report which includes recommendations for the 2017 legislative session (25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload statewide by 2022; 100/20 by 2026).
 - Work with the counties of Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan and the Blandin Foundation to ensure that each of the nine counties in Region Nine become members in the Blandin Broadband Cohort.*
 - Work with Office of Broadband Development and providers to help update the Connect Minnesota service maps in the nine counties in Region Nine to include all providers' data and ensure that the maps are as accurate as possible.
- ★ Work with local legislators and the State Office of Broadband Development to provide support for more funding to be apportioned to the state to implement broadband infrastructure and planning in rural Minnesota.
 - Partner with representatives of the Governor's Broadband Task Force to help reinforce the recommendations made to the state and ensure that the challenges of businesses, residents, and community anchor institutions across Region Nine are well represented.

*Martin County became a member in the Blandin Broadband Cohort in 2014.

²⁶Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Connected Nation, April 2017

Transportation

Reliable transportation networks are essential to economic growth, production and trade. Without access to a well-maintained freight/transportation network, raw materials, goods and products cannot be transported, which would result in low to no productivity in the region.

According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's 2016 Statewide Freight System Plan, 40 percent of the gross state product is dependent on freight-related industries, a higher percentage than many of Minnesota's neighboring states.²⁶ Trucking is important to all industries, as even goods moving via other modes often use trucks for the first and last mile of the trip. As of 2015, Region Nine has 153 freight trucking businesses, which is approximately 8.4 percent of Minnesota's general freight trucking businesses.²⁷



Goal

Increase local transportation economic development projects in the region.

Strategies

- ★ Encourage state and local units of government to support and pursue options that increase the availability of transportation funding.
 - Participate in regional highway corridor coalitions.
- ★ Maintain and/or promote major transportation routes that connect regional economic hubs to stimulate economic development.
 - Identify important freight routes which serve a supplementary role to the Minnesota trunk highway system to promote the safe and efficient movement of goods.
 - Partner with MnDOT to help identify potential freight enhancement projects that have good potential for a positive return on investment.

²⁶ Minnesota Department of Transportation, Statewide Freight System Plan, 2016

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau's, 2015 County Business Patterns

Active Transportation

Active living planning and implementation of active living strategies will help improve community health, livability and social capital in the region. By partnering with the Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC), they will assist communities to improve conditions for better bikeable communities. Currently, there is only one community in south central Minnesota that is designated as a bicycle friendly community, Greater Mankato. Encouraging the adoption of local complete streets policies will increase the awareness and improve the local transportation network's functionality for all users.



Goal

Increase the number of communities that have achieved BFC-designated status by League of American Bicyclists.

Strategies

- ★ Develop plans with local partners and help connect them with funding sources that will develop, expand and maintain active transportation networks.
 - Promote the availability and benefits of trail systems to increase awareness and support for increased active living in Region Nine communities.
 - Continue partnering with the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership to promote active living in communities.

Transit

Transit is an increasing and important need for rural and small urban centers in south central Minnesota. The region must evaluate the area's needs to meet demand and reduce the mobility gap.



Goal

Increase the level of service of the region's transit system.

Strategies

- ★ Evaluate funding and service options to meet mobility and access needs of individuals.
 - Coordinate transit providers across the region to assist in efficiently connecting people to jobs and services.
 - Closely align policy decisions and funding availability with the supply and demand of transit services in region.

Housing Availability

Housing challenges that can arise in communities are, tight rental and ownership markets, cost-burdened households, workforce and elderly housing shortages and low quality and aging housing stock. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, families who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities. In Region Nine, Blue Earth County has the highest number of renters that spend more than 30 percent of income on housing with a total of 50.8 percent of renters. Both Nicollet and Le Sueur counties have about 40 percent of renters that spend more than 30 percent of income on housing. Watonwan County has the lowest number of renters that spend more than 30 percent of income on housing with a total of 27.1 percent of renters.

Additionally, a five percent vacancy rate is generally considered a sign of a healthy rental housing market, currently per the 2011-2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates all counties are above the five percent vacancy rate except Faribault (3%), Nicollet (2.9%), Sibley (3.4%), Waseca (2.8%) and Watonwan (4.8%).²⁹



Goal

Move toward equilibrium in local housing markets.

Strategies

- ★ Increase the development of workforce housing.
- ★ Encourage the development of a variety of housing types for all, including: seniors, low-income, newcomers and the workforce.
- ★ Provide more coordinated housing planning for communities on a local and regional scale.
 - Collect and share best management practices around housing projects, policies and financing.
 - Encourage development of transitional and life-cycle housing in rural communities.

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

Water and wastewater infrastructure projects are difficult to fund especially with a small population base versus a larger community being able to spread the project costs across a larger population.²⁸ According to the MPCA 2017 Clean Water Project Priority List (PPL) there are 17 cities in Region Nine that are listed. The project cost ranges from approximately \$80,000 to \$13.4 million. Of the \$1.5 billion of total estimated project costs in Minnesota, over \$89 million are in the Region Nine area.



Goal

Decrease the number of communities out of MPCA compliance and increase the number of communities and projects on the MPCA PPL.

Strategies

- ★ Develop appropriate water and wastewater infrastructure to support existing and new business and housing developments.
 - Facilitate and educate local communities with best practices that illustrate funding options to update outdated and undersized systems.