



Minnesota Equity Blueprint Priorities 2020 Minnesota Legislature

Two troubling trends pose the most important threats to Minnesota’s long-term prosperity and quality of life. They are: widening inequalities (racial, economic and geographic), and climate change and related forms of environmental degradation.

Most Minnesotans want a future where all of us, regardless of race or income or geography or gender or ability, are realizing our full potential and contributing to the common good. Most also want a Minnesota where our climate is stable, where our precious lakes and rivers are clean, and where our land use is sustainable and healthy.

In pursuit of this vision, Growth & Justice and OneMN.org have partnered to create the Thriving by Design Network and a process that involved more than 300 individuals and dozens of organizations – from across rural, small-town, suburban and urban Minnesota. We asked participants: What are the statewide public policies and local and individual actions that move us toward a more equitable and environmentally resilient home?

Their answers are contained in the recently released Minnesota Equity Blueprint, a 170-page guidebook with 140 recommendations for long-term strategies, specific public policies and local practices that reduce inequalities and restore a resilient environment. From that Blueprint, the partners in the Minnesota Equity Blueprint offer these more immediate recommendations for the 2020 Minnesota Legislature.

The 2020 legislative priorities are only a start. In coming months and years the Thriving by Design Network will elaborate and expand on the Blueprint and each year we will revise and improve both our legislative priorities and recommendations for local action in every region of the state.

Economic Development & Security

Problems: Economic indicators reveal stagnation or decline in parts of rural Minnesota, as well as in lower-income neighborhoods in regional centers and the urban core. Barriers to economic growth include limited access to capital, a shortage of skilled workers and an environment in which compensation is not keeping up with rising costs for housing, health care, childcare and higher education.

Solutions:

- Increase investment in widening access to quality child care for working families of modest means, by increasing funding and eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program and helping rural communities develop more robust child care solutions.
- Enact policies and incentives for employers to lift wages and benefits for low-pay workers. These could include an insurance program that ensures paid family and medical leave, while protecting the right of local communities to opt for higher wage minimums. Incentivize employers to provide a basic level of accrued “sick and safe time.”
- Support new markets for agriculture products and farmers who seek to diversify their crops. Fund programs that assist with succession planning, and encourage ownership by Latinos, Hmong and other people of color interested in farming. Offer a MinnesotaCare buy-in option to farmers, entrepreneurs and small-business owners.
- Expand investment and reform Human Service programs to end abuses and connect people with disabilities with mainstream jobs that respect their dignity and provide living wages. Improve transportation services and explore the potential of autonomous vehicles for the disabled.
- Tighten laws to prevent wage theft and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Enact policies that tap the full potential and advance the economic status of women and LGBTQ communities.
- Improve access to capital, including policies that strengthen local community banks. Invest in business incubators and cross sector partnerships that support emerging commercial enterprise. Develop portable benefits which allow workers to more easily become entrepreneurs or to work for small business.
- Invest in the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota program, a matched savings project which helps low-income families build assets for purchase of home, starting a small business or pursuing higher education.

Links: [Minnesota Asset Building Coalition](#), [Minnesota Association of Development Organizations](#), [Greater MSP](#), [Main Street Alliance](#), [Institute for Agriculture and Trade](#), [Minnesota Food Association](#), [Minnesota State Council on Disability](#), [Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy](#), [Womens March MN](#), [OutFront MN](#)

Climate Action and Environment

Problems: Our federal government's latest climate report (NCA4) warns of immediate and long-term climate change threats to Minnesota and the Midwest, including increased flooding, the spread of pollution and invasive species, new forms of blight and disease on our crops, and degradation of forests and wilderness treasures. Some experts predict that agricultural output in the Midwest could revert to levels of the late 1970s. Simultaneous with these environmental threats, corporate and state interests often are permitted to override Indigenous people's tribal sovereignty, threatening nationhood and valued ways of life. Many studies show that low-income households and people of color in every region suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change, declining water quality and other environmental damage.

Solutions:

- Set higher long-term goals and accelerated timetables for reducing carbon emissions, achieving renewable energy conversion, reducing waste, and cleaning up Minnesota's impaired waters.
- Enact a robust combination of proposals that provide: school energy conservation loan funds; energy efficiency grants for homes, businesses, local governments and assisted living facilities; pilot projects for composting in multi-family buildings; distributed energy project grants; statewide grants for solar installations in schools and residences; grant programs for electric school buses for transit systems and school buses; and electric vehicle rebates.
- Increase funding for the Conservation Reserve Program and for study of carbon sequestration on private and public lands.
- Honor and fight for the sovereign rights of Native American nations to protect their environments and subsist from natural resources.
- Enact policies and invest more to protect and restore the quality of Minnesota's lakes, rivers and groundwater. Priorities include: bonding bill provisions for the Water Infrastructure Funding Program; supplemental assistance grants to communities for high-cost clean water and drinking water infrastructure; increasing the Point Source Implementation Grants Program; cost-share grants that help local communities construct wastewater, storm water and drinking water treatment projects; and a state match for the Federal Wastewater Infrastructure Fund.

Links: [Minnesota's 100% Campaign](#) , [RE-AMP](#), [Fresh Energy](#), [Great Plains Institute](#), [Rural Renewable Energy Alliance](#), [Indigenous Environmental Network](#), [Minnesota Environmental Partnership](#), [Clean Water Action](#), [Minnesota Indian Affairs Council](#), [Friends of the Mississippi River](#)

Infrastructure, Transportation and Transit

Problems: The latest report from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Minnesota a 'C' for the overall condition of the state's infrastructure. Roads, drinking water and transit each scored lower than C grades. Most of our systems were built in the mid to late 20th century, before innovations in materials and technology were developed, and before environmental safeguards requiring upgrades to wastewater and drinking water system. Failing infrastructure is more prevalent in our state's oldest and lower-income neighborhoods, in both small towns and the urban core, disproportionately affecting rural communities and people of color.

Solutions:

- Approve a maximum-effort bonding bill, upward of \$2 billion, that will provide funding for repairing and improving wastewater and drinking water systems, particularly in rural areas and smaller towns in Greater Minnesota
- Fund new transportation initiatives to improve mobility services across Minnesota, particularly in small town, rural and suburban areas of Minnesota where the population is increasingly elderly, disabled and underserved.
- Incentivize business to fund employee transit. Work with state and local partners to evaluate funding and service options to meet mobility and access needs of individuals.
- Seek ways to take advantage of state-of-the-art advances in asset management, materials and technology.
- Despite consensus that a major new transportation investment package will once again have to wait until 2021, the Legislature should continue to study and seek consensus for a comprehensive solution that provides at least \$7 billion over the next decade from the gas tax and other sources for long-term maintenance and improvements to highways, roads, bridges, light-rail and other transit, and bike/pedestrian options, in both Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metropolitan area.
- As a stopgap until major funding bill can be enacted, approve ¾-cent increase in metro sales tax to fund improvements and safety in metro transit, along with \$40 million for Greater Minnesota transit, walking and pedestrian infrastructure.

Links: [The American Society of Civil Engineers - Minnesota Chapter](#), [Move Minnesota, Transportation Forward](#), [Minnesota Transportation Alliance](#).

Health Care

Problems: High-quality affordable health care remains elusive for many low-income workers in rural and urban Minnesota. Farmers, immigrants and small business owners are also less likely to have access to health care. Meanwhile wide racial inequalities persist in health outcomes, particularly for Latino, African-American and Native American people. The lack of preventive care and resulting health problems are a strain on both employers and taxpayers.

Solutions:

- Ensure that more low- and moderate-income Minnesotans are covered for basic health, dental, mental, and vision services through expanded “buy-in” eligibility for MinnesotaCare. Protect MNsure and Medicaid coverage and other federal, state and local health-care safeguards and consider steps toward one public financing system of universal health care coverage.
- Extend paid sick leave and family leave to workers in Minnesota through a state-administered paid leave insurance program.
- Increase funding for Minnesota’s Good Food Access Program which addresses the lack of access to healthy and culturally appropriate food in many rural and urban neighborhoods.
- Adjust health-care reimbursements to accurately reflect the relatively higher costs of delivering service in rural areas, increasing grants to ensure the survival of rural hospital. Enhance public health programs that focus on rural health research, emergency preparedness, chronic disease prevention and disease monitoring.

Links: [Minnesota Department of Health Equity reports](#), [Health Care for All Minnesota](#), [Minnesota Public Health Association \(2019 Legislative Priorities\)](#), [Minnesota Rural Health Association](#), [Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity](#)

Education, Early Childhood Through Post Secondary

Problems: Minnesota’s long-term economic health is threatened by the wide and persistent racial and regional disparities in education outcomes, from early childhood development through kindergarten readiness, competence in reading and math in K-12, and post-secondary completion. Barriers to educational attainment and workforce training are higher for rural populations in general, and for communities of color statewide.

Solutions:

- Approve increased investment of up to \$500 million for early childhood development, including early learning scholarships, all day pre-K programs in public schools, child-care assistance subsidies, home visiting programs, direct support to child-care providers, and evaluation of systems and methods.

- Increase funding and encourage development of proven “two-generation” models, which educate children and parents together and expand home visiting programs by health and social service professionals for infants and toddlers and their parents.
- Create and expand Career Academy, Career Pathway, and other proven fast-track routes to good jobs, in addition to incentives for college completion and post-secondary attainment.
- Increase funding and incentives for local community-based education partnership models in Greater Minnesota and urban Minnesota, under the auspices of the Promise Neighborhoods and Strive Together networks.
- Provide student debt reduction/forgiveness to health care professionals and teachers in return for their commitment to practice in underserved communities throughout Minnesota and on tribal lands.
- Fund programs and reform credentialing policies to increase the percentage of teachers and staff of color in school systems.
- Expand funding and remove institutional obstacles for more early college programs, such as Post Secondary Enrollment Options.
- Consider amending the Minnesota state constitution with language that assures “an equal right to high-quality public education.”
- End school district “lunch shaming” practices that involve penalties and stigmatizing students who benefit from free-and-reduced school nutrition programs.

Links: [MinneMinds](#), [Minnesota Office of Higher Education Educational Attainment Goal 2025 Report](#), [Minnesota Education Equity Partnership](#), [Center for School Change](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Students United](#), [Education Partnerships Coalition](#), [Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis](#), [People for PSEO](#)

Broadband & Digital Inclusion

Problems: More than a half-million Minnesotans still lack access to a wired connection capable of very minimal upload and download speeds. They are located primarily in rural Minnesota but low-income people in metro areas are underserved as well. The lack of optimum connectivity to the national and global economy is a major barrier to equal opportunity and economic development in an increasingly digital world.

Solutions:

- Align public policies with the principle that internet connectivity has become essential to individual and economic competitiveness and should be considered a public necessity, regulated and provided in same manner as electricity, energy and transportation and health care.

- Provide on-going supplemental funding of the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program. Extend grant periods to multi-year grants for improved planning and deployment.
- Provide direct funding for broadband mapping. Add data collection and mapping related to home broadband affordability, the broadband adoption rates of low-income households, and the digital redlining of urban neighborhoods. Develop an inventory for best management practices (BMP) for broadband and deployment of broadband service in rural, sparsely populated areas, in high-cost regions, and in under-resourced urban neighborhoods.

Links: [Minnesota Office of Broadband Development](#), [Minnesota Governor's Broadband Task Force](#).

Housing

Problems: A shortage of quality affordable housing has reached crisis conditions for low-and middle-income households, as well as forming barriers to business expansion in Greater Minnesota. Home ownership is the greatest asset most families in Minnesota have, providing personal and financial stability and supporting income mobility. Minnesota's racial disparity in homeownership is the nation's 3rd largest (76 percent of whites compared to only 41 percent people of color owning their own homes). People of color also are much more likely than white Minnesotans to live in rental housing they cannot afford. As a result, homelessness has become not only a growing humanitarian concern, but social service costs are rising rapidly.

Solutions:

- Sustain early bi-partisan House support and approve up to \$500 million in state bonding to support a broad range of affordable housing investments including new construction of affordable housing in every region and preservation and improvement of public housing and affordable units owned by nonprofits or private individuals.
- Take steps to prevent the loss of project-based Section 8 and naturally occurring affordable rental units due to contract expirations, sales to "upmarket" developers, and demolitions.
- Create new sustainable options for workforce housing expansion across Greater Minnesota, attracting newcomers and immigrant workers to sustain and revitalize existing and new businesses. Issue additional congregate rural housing permits.
- Expand Minnesota Housing Finance Agency access and education related to alternative interest-free Murabaha financing, for Muslim home-buyers.
- Increase access to funding among lower-and middle-income families wanting to buy a house, reserving significant dollars for households of color.

- Conduct a thorough regulatory review of residency requirements, building standards, and land use and environmental protections that impact the profitability and viability of affordable housing.

Links: [Minnesota Housing Partnership](#), [Homes for All](#), [Minnesota Housing Measures Report \(HousingLink/McKnight Foundation\)](#), [Minnesota Council for Affordable and Rural Housing](#)

Immigration

Problems: Attitude of resentment and federal or state anti-immigrant policies are damaging to local economies and quality of life. Even though Minnesota’s immigrant population wields annual purchasing power of more than \$5 billion and pays more than \$800 million in taxes, our region has been slow to tap the full workforce and civic engagement potential of this rich resource, particularly among immigrants of color from Africa, Latin America and Asia. Business leaders are increasingly adamant about the need for more immigrants joining the state’s labor force, to sustain both immediate and long-term economic growth.

Solutions:

- Extend eligibility for driver’s licenses or residence IDs to all workers, regardless of immigration status, to ensure access to employment and community involvement.
- Reform post-secondary systems’ admission standards to recognize higher education credentials from immigrants’ home country institutions.
- Provide incentives for communities to implement the priorities of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce’s “Growing Minnesota” initiative, including building respect for cultural differences in schools, businesses and communities, and finding ways to celebrate diversity and to defuse local social tensions.

Links: [Grow Minnesota!](#), [Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota](#), [Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee](#), [Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs](#), [Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans](#)

Criminal Justice Reform

Problems: Minnesota’s criminal justice system disproportionately punishes low-income households and people of color and deprives employers of enormous talent and energy. If convicted of a felony, people become even further burdened by collateral consequences that form barriers to housing, employment and family reunification. Corrections policy emphasizes punishment at the expense of rehabilitation and return to community. Problems begin with racially biased school discipline, extend to racial profiling and too frequent brutality by police, lack of access to quality legal assistance for low-income people accused of crimes, lengthier

sentences and higher incarceration rates, overly long and restrictive parole policies, all adding up to a lifetime of disadvantage.

Solutions:

- Allow changes already approved by Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission that impose a five-year cap on probation periods for most offenses.
- Continue the progress achieved by sentencing reforms in recent years, framing the response to drug abuse and mental illness as primarily a health issue rather than as a criminal justice issue.
- Enact reforms in housing and employment law to support full return to community for formerly incarcerated persons, and provision of wrap-around services that assist with the transition from jail/prison to community. Relax background check requirements to expand opportunity for individuals to participate in the workforce.
- Enable faster and easier expungement of criminal records. Reform laws that create a “debt trap” from fines and fees, allowing judges to waive surcharges and curtailing driver’s license suspensions for unpaid traffic tickets.
- Encourage further reforms in state and local law enforcement practices that reduce instances of racial profiling, police brutality and shooting and killing of suspects, as recommended by the Minnesota Working Group on Police-Involved Deadly Force Encounters.
- Adopt the Uniform Collateral Consequences of Conviction Act, requiring full disclosure of the more than 500 Minnesota statutes and regulations that penalize ex-offenders. Require that defendants be informed of the possible application of the collateral consequences when charged, before sentencing, and upon release from custody. Provide methods for a court to grant relief from collateral consequences for purposes of employment, education, housing, public benefits and occupational licensing.

Links: [Minnesota Justice Research Center](#), [Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Minnesota Urban League](#), [Minnesota Neighborhoods Organizing for Change](#), [#Justice for All \(Take Action Minnesota\)](#), [Minnesota Second Chance Coalition](#)

Democracy and Civic Health

Problems: Despite Minnesota’s high rankings on voter participation, about 40 percent of our eligible voters do not vote in mid-term elections and about 25 percent do not vote in presidential elections. Fewer people are stepping up to be candidates, particularly in local rural elections, and people of color are under-represented in elected office statewide. Meanwhile, citizen dissatisfaction is growing over the influence of wealthy individuals and powerful special interests in both election outcomes and policy-making process. Disenfranchisement rates for African-Americans, American Indians and Latinos are many times higher than for the general population. A potential undercount in the 2020 Census puts Minnesota at greater risk of losing one of its eight congressional seats.

Solutions:

- Support policy recommendation of the “Restore the Vote” movement and efforts to restore voting rights for formerly incarcerated women and men who are still on parole. Consider also making voting truly an inalienable right by restoring the vote for those currently incarcerated, as in Vermont and Maine.
- Expand registration by automatically registering eligible Minnesota voters who interact with government agencies.
- To further encourage participation and promote more civil campaigns, expand ranked-choice voting.
- Refrain from imposing unnecessary and discriminatory new voter ID requirements, which were soundly rejected by voters in 2012.
- Extend “ban the box” legislation (ending required disclosure of criminal record) for applications to serve on state boards and commissions.
- Fund cybersecurity measures to prevent tampering with Minnesota elections by foreign governments and other entities.
- Ensure non-partisan redistricting and a permanent bulwark against gerrymandering through creation of a Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission which has the authority to draw boundaries that result in proportional representation for people of color and low-income communities, and without regard to partisan advantage.
- Ensure an accurate and complete count for Census 2020, by increasing state investment in organizing a successful count of all Minnesotans in this Census, future Censuses, and for American Community Survey data collection.

Links: [Minnesota Secretary of State Investing in Democracy Priorities](#), [Restore the Vote](#), [Common Cause](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#),

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